LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
SEP 14 1937
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Division PZ3
Section .A212G

GLIMPSES OF GRANDEUR

⁂

By the Same Author

GOD AND COMPANY, UNLIMITED

REDISCOVERED COUNTRIES

DID JESUS MEAN IT?

DARE WE MEET THE CHALLENGE?

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
SEP 14 1937
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Glimpses of Grandeur

* *

FRANK DURWARD ADAMS, D.D.
Minister
CHURCH OF OUR FATHER, DETROIT

HARPER & BROTHERS
Publishers
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1 9 3 0

GLIMPSES OF GRANDEUR
Copyright, 1930, by
Harper & Brothers
Printed in the U. S. A.
First Edition
I-E

* FOREWORD *

In this group of twelve narrative chapters the life of Jesus is sketched from a fresh point of view. Some imagination has been indulged in working out the details of plot, setting and conversation, but nowhere do they depart from historical verity. The primary purpose has been, not to produce another formal biography of Jesus, but rather to present a series of consecutive pictures throwing into sharp relief the most significant scenes and characteristics of his ministry. Each chapter had to be dealt with as a unit, keeping in mind that some of its hearers would not have the background of the preceding narratives; also that some would not hear those to follow. So there may be a little overlapping in places, as well as a missing link here and there. Attempt to obviate these difficulties would be to spoil the general structure.

The chronology of Mark's account has been closely followed. With one or two minor exceptions Moffatt's translation of the Bible has been used throughout.

Acknowledgment is made of the kind permission of authors and owners of copyrights to use the poems quoted in the text, as follows: Edwin Markham, for "The Dream"; The Christian Century, for "He

Came to Earth One Blue-Skied Day"; Robert Freeman, for "White Captain of My Soul"; Richard R. Smith, Inc., for Studdert-Kennedy's "Indifference."

F. D. A.

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER
Detroit, Michigan
August, 1930

* CONTENTS *

PAGE

I. A Young Man Finds Himself
The carpenter-shop—Motes in a sunbeam—The Decision—From the hill-top of Nazareth—At the fords of the Jordan—Preaching of John the Baptizer—Baptism of Jesus—The inner Voice and Vision. 3

II. The Reaction of a Dazzling Vision
A modern lad's religious experience—Jesus seeks a retreat—From the Jordan to the Wilderness—Turn of the emotional tide—Sundry temptations in terms of the present day—Victory 21

III. Fame on a Frail Foundation
Genius as a household irritant—Peter and his mother-in-law—Jesus as Guest and Healer—In the synagogue—Opposition begins—Great popularity—The foundation crumbles 38

IV. The Peril of the Premature Laugh
Fountain of the Virgin—The village gossips—A town-boy's notoriety—The division in Mary's household—Jesus comes home—The neighbors reject him—The premature laugh 55

PAGE

V. Comrades of the Road

On the dusty highway—Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot—What is the Kingdom?—What are unclean spirits?—The disciples' real mission—In Zadok's house—On the house-top—Unclean spirits cast out 75

VI. A Woman's Terrible Revenge

Varus the Roman—A family quarrel—Herodias' intrigue—Her bloody request—The birthday banquet—Salome's dance—Her request—Death of John the Baptizer—End of Herod Antipas 96

VII. An Impromptu Picnic

Excitement in Mahlon's house—They join the crowd—Sermon on the hillside—Sundown and time for supper—Jesus' challenge to the crowd's unselfishness—The miracle of the loaves and fishes 121

VIII. A Strange Light on a Hilltop

"The beauty of the Lord our God"—The end of a day's journey—Four men seek the mountain-side—Was He the fulfillment of hope and prophecy?—Was it a dream?—Peter's baffling question 143

IX. The Leather-Covered Box

Mary of Bethany and the spikenard—Judas makes protest—The home of Iscariot—His

PAGE

call and the leather-covered box—A misfit in the company—Succumbing to temptation—Judas and the Sanhedrin—The betrayal—Judas' terrible death 159

X. A HEART-BREAK IN THE SILENCE
Stillness and moonlight—Among the olive-trees—The three fall asleep—The agony of being misunderstood—We meet great crises alone—The peace of the long look 181

XI. THOSE REVERED INSTITUTIONS
Azariah holds a caucus—The plot agreed upon—The reason for the hostility to Jesus—The Sanhedrin votes to arrest Jesus—Jesus before his accusers—Three crosses on Golgotha 196

XII. CONQUERING DEATH—AND SOMETHING WORSE
Seven in the Upper Room—A wonderful anniversary—Zacchaeus' demon cast out—Confession of Judas, brother of Jesus—His mother speaks—The demoniac of Gadara—The testimony of the Roman soldier—Of Mary of Magdala—The mystic cross 217

GLIMPSES OF GRANDEUR

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"Here I send my messenger before your face
to prepare the way for you:
The voice of one who cries in the desert,
'Make the way ready for the Lord,
level the paths for him,' "—

John appeared baptizing in the desert and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; and the whole of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him and got baptized by him in the Jordan river, confessing their sins. John was dressed in camel's hair, with a leather girdle round his loins, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He announced,

"After me one who is mightier will come,
And I am not fit to stoop and untie the
string of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water,
but he will baptize you with the holy Spirit."

Now it was in those days that Jesus arrived from Nazareth in Galilee and got baptized in the Jordan by John. And the moment he rose from the water he saw the heavens cleft and the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove; then said a voice from heaven,

"Thou art my Son, the Beloved,
in Thee is my delight."
Mark 1:2-11 (Moffatt)

⁂

I

A YOUNG MAN FINDS HIMSELF

The carpenter-shop—Motes in a sunbeam—The Decision—From the hill-top of Nazareth—At the fords of the Jordan—Preaching of John the Baptizer—Baptism of Jesus—The inner Voice and Vision.

The afternoon sunlight came streaming through the open door of the little carpenter-shop, splashing a golden pool in the center of the hard earthen floor. Flecks of dust, like tiny fireflies, danced in and out of its amber radiance. The young man who had been working rather perfunctorily at his bench for the last half-hour stood still and gazed into the shaft of light. It was a curious thing, but it seemed to precipitate quite suddenly the thoughts which had been hovering all day in the limbo of his mind. Odd, unrelated ideas had been darting to and fro exactly like these dust-mites in the sunbeam. Seeing those shining things brought him to an abrupt realization of what had been going on in his unquiet brain. So he began straightway to gather up these filaments of fancy and twist them together into a cable of resolution.

Yes, he would have to go. Some strange power impelled. For several days now rumors had been coming of extraordinary doings down along the lower waters of the Jordan. More than fifty miles that was. Quite a little journey in that small, self-contained country. But he must go and see for himself. A prophet from the hill-region of the south was setting the nation agog. No honeyed words were his, but stern and scorching warnings of judgment and a new era which he called the Reign or Kingdom of Heaven. And he was baptizing in the Jordan a multitude of those who had given heed to his message. John was his name. He was about the age of the young carpenter, folks said. And one evening as they talked about it at home, the carpenter's mother had told him that this man of the fiery voice might prove to be a cousin once or twice removed. She had relatives in the hill-country; and it had been reported that one of the boys was something of a religious fanatic. It would not be strange if this John proved to be that very one.

But that was only an incidental detail. It was not a possible blood-relationship that was drawing Jesus the carpenter irresistibly away from his work-bench. Something in the message of this dauntless prophet from the hills had struck fire in his own brain. "The Reign of Heaven is near!" That was the keynote of John's proclamation. And men everywhere must repent; that is, they must change their habits of thinking and living to be worthy of citizenship in this new spiritual order.

Ah, that was the very truth which had been germinating in the carpenter's heart for years on end! It had been planted there as a tiny seed when he was only a child. While other children romped and played in the streets he would often sit down somewhere in the shade of a tree or in the doorway of their humble home and brood with long, long thoughts on matters which even his mother could not understand. When he asked her about them she would look at him oddly, and turn away. Not with impatience or disapproval—she was always tender and kind. But a gleam of something like dread and fear would come into her eyes when she heard him ask about mystical things which even the graybeards could not fathom.

How well he remembered that time in Jerusalem when he was only twelve years old. Fascinated by the temple with its brooding solemnity and faint odor of incense, he had lingered there when the caravan from Nazareth had set out for home. He had been a little panicky when he realized that they had gone on without him. But this opportunity was not to be lost. Now he would find out about some of the things which had been puzzling him. So he asked one of the teachers to tell him about God. It was an innocent question and it gushed out of an eager, impetuous mind. And the teacher looked so wise and so capable of answering. He had a long white beard, and there were wide, pretty fringes on his robe. But the teacher had reacted just as his mother had done. He looked startled for an instant, then somewhat mystified. Before the boy realized what was happening several other teachers had gathered round him, and they talked together for a long time. But he never could understand why they looked at him so queerly when he answered some of their questions.

But now that same eager curiosity, which all his elders had tried to curb, was driving him down to the Jordan where John was preaching. But no, that wasn't quite true. Not everybody had tried to put a curb upon him. His father Joseph had never put him off when he asked his odd questions. Joseph could not always answer them. But he always tried; and the boy knew that his father somehow understood what was stirring in his soul. Often he would come home from the synagogue-school wrestling with some knotty problem which had come up in their study of the scriptures. He would go into the shop where Joseph was working on an ox-yoke or doing some repair work for a neighbor and talk with him about it. And while his father tried to clear up the mystery the little boy would take up the tools one by one and get used to the "feel" of them. He would need that knowledge of tools later on when he succeeded his father as the village carpenter.

But Joseph had been dead for several years now. He did not live to see his first-born become a man. But he had lived long enough, and in such intimate comradeship with this strange lad, that his son ever thereafter in thinking and speaking of God called him Father. Who would care to live longer than that in this world? What more was there left for Joseph to do?

So he couldn't talk to Joseph about it. And there was no one else in Nazareth who had any patience with his crazy ideas. It seemed odd, too, for they were all smarting under the political tyranny of Rome. Regularly the robber tax-collectors came around and exacted the last possible mite and the utmost grain of corn from the despairing people. But they were helpless. A great sterility had fallen upon the church. Mercy and truth and brotherhood were forgotten, while the scribes wrangled over the meaning of obscure sayings in the Law and the Pharisees imposed a multitude of rabbinical ceremonials. The villagers were being starved, body and soul. Yet no one had the spirit to rebel or the courage to respond to a challenging prophetic word. They had listened to dreamers before, and there were still stains on the pavements where martyrs had shed their blood when the Roman legions came down. No, they could not risk it again. And, besides, who would be foolish enough to suppose that a young fellow from their own town could do anything about it or knew anything about it?

*

The pool of sunlight on the earthen floor had dried up, for the sun had dropped below the western rim of hills and the golden beam had disappeared. Jesus had almost made up his mind. If he went, it would probably be only for a few days. After hearing this preacher a time or two he could get the drift and meaning of his message. He could find out about this Reign of Heaven which seemed to promise release to his captive nation and healing for their broken hearts. His brothers could take care of the shop while he was gone; or, in any event, it could be closed for a week or so, as there was very little work coming in. The people were too poor to order anything done except the most indispensable little jobs of repairing. Yes, he believed he would go.

It was very quiet at supper. Jesus would have liked to discuss the resolution he had almost taken, but he knew it was useless. The family would never consent to it. He had hinted once before to his mother that he would like to go to see and hear this possible cousin of his; but she had answered with a little catch in her voice that he must not think of such a thing. So, after they had eaten, he went out by himself, climbed the slope of the hills which nestled

Nazareth on every side, up to the summit just north of the village.

The west was still ablaze with the sunset, though the shadows had fallen over the town. The carpenter looked around him. Far away to the south stretched the Plains of Esdraelon, over whose length the armies of the world had thundered for three thousand years. Here the war-chariots from the lowlands had clashed in combat with Arab horsemen and the doughty herdsmen from the hills. The fate of many an empire had been cast in that plain; and Jesus thought with a shudder of the impending time when an army bearing the Roman Eagles would come marching down to crush out the small semblance of liberty which Israel still cherished. Not much longer would the tyrant of the Tiber suffer the complaints and the petty insurrections of this proud-spirited people. Away to the west stood up the peaks of Mount Carmel. Between them and the sea was the ancient caravan route, well-worn and old hundreds of years before the days of Abraham. Even as he gazed in that direction the young man knew that the pulse of world trade was throbbing up and down that hoary highway. To the east and north could be seen Mount Tabor, with undulating hills between; while to the east and a little south the ground fell away toward the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan. That way also was a main traveled highway, and it led near to Nazareth. In the gathering darkness Jesus could discern belated caravans still moving. Yonder, too, was a detail of Roman soldiers, hurrying home to their barracks and supper from some punitive mission to one of the neighboring villages of Galilee. There was still light enough so he could catch an occasional glint from their spear-points. And that was a symbol of the world's subjection. It was the reign of hatred, tyranny and fear. There must be a better way. The Reign of Heaven?

Yes, he must go! Tomorrow he would go!

*

Four days later the carpenter was at the fords of the Jordan, not far from Jericho. He had come down from Nazareth with a caravan of merchants who were bound for Jerusalem. When they neared Jericho, Jesus and a few others who had joined them on the way, and who, like him, were going to see and hear the new prophet from the hill-country, left the main party and turned eastward toward the Jordan. The journey had been unhurried, but the carpenter would have been glad to make more haste. As mile after mile stretched away behind them, he became aware of a mounting emotionalism. His heart beat high at the thought of the impending meeting. Somehow he felt that it was to be a pivotal hour in his career, an hour upon which high destiny was to impinge. Yet there was no obvious reason why he should feel that way. These other men who were bent upon the same errand did not seem to see anything significant about it. Curiosity, more than anything else, was impelling them. They laughed and joked about this "ducking preacher," who was reported to be baptizing so many folks that they had lost count. Just one of those "emotional revivals" which fanatics were so apt to stir up. It would soon lose its vogue, and most of those who had been baptized would turn to some other source of excitement. Yet, of course, this John might prove to be another political agitator whom the Romans would have to deal with.

Jesus did not like to recall the scene when he had left home. He had told his mother as gently as he could of his decision. And he had made it plain that the decision was unalterable. It was not because of any whim or stubbornness on his part. He would gladly have stayed and worked in the carpenter-shop if he could. But the point was that he could not. Some power greater than his own had laid necessity upon him, and he had to go. The claims of his mother and the rest of the family were not to be lightly cast aside; and in Israel these claims are deemed most sacred. But here was a higher obligation, one that was not to be argued about. It was useless to try to make the others understand. They just laughed, rather bitterly, at the idea of there being any spiritual compulsion in the desire to hear a half-crazy preacher talk about things which even the rabbis agreed were worse than foolish. It was only an excuse to get out and enjoy a holiday while most of the family income was cut off.

Mary did not reproach her quixotic son. But she was filled with a strange foreboding. After all, it was just like him to do this thing. She could not deny that he had always been dutiful and obedient, both to herself and to his father as long as he had lived. But it was an obedience which always imprest one with the curious feeling that some more regnant loyalty was brooding in his heart, patiently awaiting the hour when it should assume the mastery of his life. Now that hour had come. Though she had always felt that it would come, she could not consent that he should go, however strongly he might protest that it was only for a little while, just a few days. She knew, they both knew, that they had reached the forks of the road. But she did not forbid him. He was not a boy any longer, but a man who had come to spiritual maturity. So she prest him in a close embrace, then turned abruptly away with that same indescribable look upon her face which he had sometimes discerned there when he had asked his elfin-like questions in his childhood days.

It was mid-afternoon when he came in sight of the place. The road led around a clump of trees, poplars, tamarisks and oleanders, then turned sharply toward the river. There they were, a motley group of people, gathered around a striking looking man who was speaking with great earnestness. All sorts and conditions of folk were here. The poor and humble were of course in the majority, for they made up the rank and file of the population. Besides, these were the people who were looking with pathetic eagerness towards anyone who might deliver them from their misery. Here and there could be seen the flutter of a Pharisee's robe. Tax-collectors and merchants mingled with the throng. Two or three Arab sheiks from the desert were listening intently. Perhaps a dozen Roman soldiers were there, but it appeared that they had come as spectators rather than on police duty. They mingled indiscriminately with the crowd, and some of them seemed strangely moved at what they heard.

The young man from Nazareth stood still for a moment and gazed upon the extraordinary scene. His heart was beating almost to suffocation. At last he was in the presence of the prophet who had proclaimed the Reign of Heaven at hand. It was true that he was a young man, not more than thirty. His face was bronzed by the hot winds of the deserts and open spaces. A tangled mass of black hair swept back from a forehead below which two burning black eyes looked out upon the rapt faces of his hearers. Arms and shoulders were bare, sunburned and sinewy. A coarse garment of camel's hair was thrown carelessly about his powerful body, and a sort of leather girdle encircled his loins. As he went on with his impassioned speaking his sturdy feet, bare of shoes or sandals, settled themselves in the sand of the river-bank; and he stood, with upraised arms, like some mighty forest tree against which the fury of the tempest was hurled in vain.

And this was John, John the Baptizer, whose name and fame were heralded throughout all the regions of the Jordan. Awed and fascinated, Jesus listened to his flaming words.

"The time is now at hand, and the Reign of Heaven is near. A new sort of citizenship challenges every man. Hatred, violence and injustice must give way. Tyranny and oppression are doomed. All things are summoned to judgment. The ax lies at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not bear good fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire. Repent and change your minds. Turn from your wicked ways, O ye stiff-necked and haughty souls, and God will have mercy upon you and make you fit citizens of His impending kingdom."

His eloquence swept his auditors like a rushing mighty wind.

"What shall we do? What shall we do?" they cried with one voice, merchants, tax-collectors, Pharisees, soldiers and common people together.

"Those of you who have clothing or food beyond your own immediate need, share them with those who have none. You tax-collectors quit your grafting and exact from the people only what is due. And you soldiers stop extorting money from the people, stop making false charges against them, and be content with your lawful wages. And all of you, in token of your nobler resolve, come and be baptized in this living water."

John turned abruptly and strode down toward the water's edge with dozens following close behind him. The river at this point was about one hundred and fifty feet wide. A lazy, sluggish current made its leisurely way between sandy banks which sloped gradually down to a maximum depth in the river-bed of only a few feet. Wading out waist-deep into the stream, with an earthen cup in his hand, John poured water upon the heads of all those who came out to him, in witness of their desire to have fellowship in the imminent realm of justice and brotherhood.

The crowd began to scatter, and in a few minutes only a few of the more eager and curious ones were left. But in the meantime others were arriving singly and in small groups. After the last candidate for baptism had waded ashore, John followed and stood for a moment upon the sandy slope watching the departing company. Would they do the things which he had commanded them? Would they have faith to believe that the Realm of God is really at hand? And would they have the daring to act out that faith? It was the question that has tormented every prophet since time began.

Jesus now drew near, boldly and yet with a certain diffidence. He must talk intimately with this young preacher. Whether they were blood-cousins or not was of small moment; but there could be no doubt of their spiritual kinship. He was still palpitating from the effect of the sermon he had heard and the simple symbolism which had followed. John saw him coming. Indeed, he had been aware of his presence ever since he appeared coming around the bend in the road beyond the trees. There was no need of an introduction. These radiant souls had known each other since the morning twilight of creation.

We shall never know what they talked about. Perhaps they discussed their physical relationship, and in what degree. But we are sure that this was not the nexus of their conversation. Talking in low, eager tones, they walked over to an oleander tree and sat down in the shade of it. They were there for an hour or more, looking into each other's eyes and reading each other's hearts. Impatiently the gathering crowd watched and waited, hoping to hear some message from John, yet not daring to interrupt this intimate conference. Jesus was evidently urging some request upon his companion, a request which John did not seem willing to grant. But Jesus insisted, with an eager, shining look upon his face. And presently they stood up and walked hand in hand down to the edge of the water, while a jostling company soon gathered about them.

The sun was nearly down, and long shadows stretched across the water. There was no wind, and the current was so gentle that the surface was almost unruffled. The two men stepped into the stream, and two half-circles of ripples rolled away from their feet. The carpenter turned his eyes toward the sky. Blue and serene it smiled down into his enraptured face. All earthly things were forgotten. Into this one fathomless moment was poured all the fullness of his thirty years of aspiration and yearning. He seemed to be lifted up in a beatific sense of union with the divine. He may have heard the few ritualistic words which came from John's lips; but if so they simply blended into the symphony singing in his soul. The limpid water poured down over his head and face, dripping in silver rivulets from his hair and beard.

Simultaneously the two turned toward the river-bank, facing the sun, which now had dropped behind the clump of poplars, tamarisks and oleanders. Pencils of radiance filtered through the interlacing boughs and lighted now and then upon their transfigured faces. The carpenter's face was still upturned toward the sky. Perhaps his eyes were closed, for the things he saw were of the spirit. Suddenly the blue vault seemed cleft asunder like the quick parting of heavy draperies. Through the opening thus made came fluttering a white dove, symbol and token of the Spirit of God. With a gasping intaking of breath the Nazarene raised both hands as if to gather the lovely thing into his bosom; and at that very instant came a voice speaking to his inner ear,

> "Thou art my Son, the Beloved,
> in thee is my delight."

It was but for an instant, both the Vision and the Voice. But it was enough. The Carpenter knew it now. The mystical intimations of those brooding years in the school, in the shop and on the hilltops, had become reality. The Young Man had found himself. Henceforth he had a work to do, a noble mission to perform. In precept and deed he would exemplify the fellowship of the realm of his Father God.

Then the Spirit drove him immediately into the desert, and in the desert he remained for forty days, while Satan tempted him; he was in the company of wild beasts, but angels ministered to him.

—Mark 1:12, 13 (Moffatt)

*

During these days he ate nothing, and when they were over he felt hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are God's son, tell this stone to become a loaf." Jesus replied to him, "It is written, Man is not to live on bread alone." Then he lifted Jesus up and showed him all the realms of the universe in a single instant; and the devil said to him, "I will give you all their power and grandeur, for it has been made over to me and I can give it to anyone I choose. If you will worship before me, then it shall all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone." Then he brought him to Jerusalem and placing him on the pinnacle of the temple said to him, "If you are God's son, throw yourself down from this; for it is written, He will give his angels charge of you, and, They will bear you on their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It has been said, You shall not tempt the Lord your God." And after exhausting every kind of temptation the devil left him till a fit opportunity arrived.

—Luke 4:2-13 (Moffatt)

⁂

II

THE REACTION OF A DAZZLING VISION

A modern lad's religious experience—Jesus seeks a retreat—From the Jordan to the Wilderness—Turn of the emotional tide—Sundry temptations in terms of the present day—Victory.

There was once a lad, and not so very many years ago, who passed through a striking religious experience. It was not unlike that of thousands of others; but an experience like this leaves upon the heart an indelible memory. To each one to whom it comes it is unique, as thrilling and unforgettable as if no one else had ever felt it before. The lad was about fifteen years old. He had had no formal religious training, though he had listened to much argument about religion. He had not been inside a church half a dozen times in his life; but what he had missed in that respect had found a substitute, if not quite an equivalent, in the fondness of some of his relatives for theological discussion. An uncle, an aunt and a grandmother—these were the three debaters who seldom failed to involve the whole company sooner or later in talk that would have astounded the learned men of the schools.

The boy invariably listened with eager interest. He always felt that his aunt and his grandmother had had a genuine experience of religion; of his uncle he was not so sure. They were of the Wesleyan persuasion; which is to say that they were Methodists. To them religion was a thing of emotionalism, violent and deep. The soul must first come under "conviction of sin"; conviction must be followed by repentance and confession; confession by conversion, in which the sinner knew himself freed of his guilt and born again, "washed in the blood of the Lamb." This cataclysmic sequence of events was expected to be climaxed by baptism and church membership, although in a great many instances the sequence was not thus completed.

The lad had heard all this argued over and over again. And each time he heard it he felt the same delicious thrill of anticipation. For he could not remember a time when he had not taken it as a matter of course that some day he would himself pass through that experience of conversion. It was as much a matter of course as his daily tasks; and these were numerous and hard enough for a boy of his tender years. It had never occurred to him that religion could mean anything else. To be sure, there were some United Presbyterians in the community who did not look with favor upon such noisy "revival stuff." But he shared the conviction of his relatives that such people could hardly be called Christians anyhow. And it had never occurred to him either that such opinion smacked rather strongly of bigotry. To put it briefly, the boy accepted his family type of religion as trustingly as he did his mother's cooking. In later years, when both were put to the test of investigation and comparison, his mother's cooking came through with flying colors.

In the fullness of time the looked-for experience came, clear, definite, distinct and unforgettable. The sequence was precisely as those disciples of John Wesley had said it would be; and the emotional climax followed without deviation in quantity or quality. If our purpose at this time were to argue about it or analyze it, we might come to some interesting conclusions about the psychology of the whole business. These conclusions might have a dismaying effect upon such naïve reasoning as that of those untutored theologians. But they could never shake this lad's faith in the genuineness of his experience or the priceless value of it as a shaping influence in his adolescent life.

But all this is only by way of setting the stage for what followed almost immediately. By means of some sort of "grapevine telegraph," the lad's grandmother learned that he had been converted. So she straightway uttered a warning. This also was consistent with the Wesleyan tradition. She told him to be on the lookout, for the devil would take him in hand before long. First there would be a reaction from the blissful experience through which he had just passed. And the slump would be awful. He would come down with a thud from his lofty mountain-top, and while in that reactionary mood the devil would be whispering all sorts of things in his heart.

"What a fool you have been," would be his first jibe. "You supposed that you and all the world were going to be different after you were 'saved,' didn't you? Well, you see, it isn't. In fact you are down in the Slough of Despond, worse off than ever. Don't be deceived. What some folks like to call conversion is only a little emotional excitement, sure to pass off in a few hours like the effect of an overdraught of wine. Do you feel any different after all that stir-up? Fact is, you probably are not saved at all."

That is the way the lad's grandmother said the devil would go about it. But he must not listen. He must spurn the Satanic suggestion and reaffirm his faith in the soundness of his conversion. That might foil Satan for a moment, but he would be sure to return to the attack almost immediately.

"Well, then," he would say, "there is no use being silly about this matter. Don't make yourself conspicuous by being too religious. You may be saved all right, but that is no reason why you shouldn't have any more fun. This idea of giving up your boon friends and your amusements is absurd. You don't want to spoil the party with a long face and a pious voice. Besides"—and here the devil would grow very confidential and convincing—"besides, if you take this new religion of yours out among your old friends and cronies, and don't spoil it all by being too goody-goody, probably you can save their souls too."

With many other admonitions the earnest grandmother sought to put the boy on his guard. And, curiously enough, it all fell out just as she said it would. She was as correct in this instance as they all had been in the matter of his conversion. The reaction came, and the whole world was as blue as indigo. And while that mood of depression was on, the devil, or some sinister influence which the boy never doubted was the devil, actually did taunt him with these and divers other thoughts of the same tenor. The mountain-top of exaltation had been followed by a vale of gloom; and while in that valley he was torn and tormented in spirit almost beyond belief. Again the Wesleyan sequence was perfect and unbroken.

*

Eighteen centuries is quite a long time, but it makes very little difference in fundamental human experience. After that rapturous vision at the Jordan, when the heavens had opened and the divine Voice had put the seal of the Eternal upon his mission, the Carpenter walked for hours as if upon air. He was in a sort of ecstasy, scarcely aware of his movements or what was going on about him. He may have spoken some word of farewell to John, but if so he was never able to recall it. The knot of people standing on the riverbank stepped aside to let him pass. They said nothing to him or to one another, for there was an incandescent glow upon his face which forbade words. Their curiosity was keen, but a kind of reverential awe had put a seal upon their lips. Among this group were a few of the intimate friends and disciples of John, and they did not forget. In a few weeks they were to find themselves following this Galilean in search of the ineffable Thing hiding behind that shining countenance.

With the spell of that vision still upon him the Carpenter moved away. One thought, or impulse, was uppermost in his mind. He must get away somewhere by himself. Somewhere where he could be alone with his emotions, where in silence he could begin to adjust himself to the breath-taking revelation which had burst upon him. Instinctively he turned off to the south and west, following the trail that led into what was known as the Wilderness of Judea.

Jesus had never been in that region before, but he knew in a vague sort of way that he would find there the solitude he craved. There the only inhabitants were a few isolated shepherds and woodsmen. It was a rocky, sterile country in which Nature begrudged every least tribute which the hand of man was able to wring from her. There John the Baptizer had brooded until the Spirit drove him forth with his proclamation of the new heavenly kingdom. There, centuries earlier, Elijah and Elisha had uttered their warnings and wrought their wonders. Thither Elijah had fled from the wrath of the raging Jezebel; and, standing in the mouth of a sheltering cave, had heard the Spirit's voice, like the sound of a gentle stillness, whispering in his fearful heart after the earthquake, wind and fire had passed over unheeded. How the boy had thrilled to these stories when he read them in the synagogue-school in Nazareth or as Joseph related them in the evening twilight circle! And now he would soon be in the midst of that austere and hallowed environment.

He hastened his steps as the night came down. A coolness fell upon his brow with the evening shadows and a calmer mood succeeded. Something like order came into his racing thoughts. And as mile after mile of the road was put behind him, his hot emotions subsided and he was able to see the entire picture in its true proportions. Maybe, after all, this *was* a kind of madness. Maybe the stolid folks in Nazareth were right about it. Maybe it had all been just a kind of ecstatic trance induced by his own supercharged feelings. The reaction had set in.

The east was all aglow with the morning when

Jesus stopped abruptly in front of a cavelike shelter in the rocks. He had walked more than twenty-five miles, perhaps thirty. The path, growing steadily rougher and more precipitous, had now led up a steep slope and then taken its way along a ledge, paralleling a terrace of limestone. It was in this terrace that the shelter had suddenly appeared. Quite as suddenly the Carpenter realized that he was weary both in body and in mind. He would turn aside here and rest awhile. There were a lot of things which needed thinking through, and this looked like a good place for meditation. But first he turned and retraced his steps a few hundred feet to the foot of a hill where he had noticed a little rivulet gurgling in the glen. When he had quenched his thirst he climbed the hill again, stepped into the shelter of overhanging rock, sat down with his back against the cool stones and gathered his loose mantle closely about him. He knew a terrific battle was impending. He would have to fight it out. Two discordant moods were raging within, and he could not proceed until one of them had been vanquished. Perhaps, if he had put his mental turmoil into words, those words would have caught the cadence of Edwin Markham's lines written more than sixty generations later:

Ah, great it is to believe the dream
As we stand in youth by the starry stream;
But a greater thing is to fight life through,
And say at the end, "The dream was true."

The events of the next few days were ever thereafter more or less a confusion in the Carpenter's memory. He had vague recollections of meeting shepherds and woodsmen from time to time and being fed and sheltered by them. There was something about him that bespoke their welcome. They received him eagerly and let him depart with regret. But he never forgot the struggle that wrenched and tortured his spirit in those days. The vividness of that subjective experience was in sharp contrast to his misty memory of objective things. Months thereafter he told his disciples something about it, but he had put it in highly symbolical language. They could not grasp it otherwise. So when they repeated the story in the years after he went away, the symbolism was made the thing of central importance, much to the disadvantage of later generations. They even symbolized the time, making it forty days that he had spent in the Wilderness, and, they said, wholly without physical sustenance of any kind.

That first day nearly killed him. He sat in his rough rock-shelter on the hillside and wavered between faith in the vision he had seen and the promptings of what some lower spirit assured him was the voice of common sense. Perhaps his half-famished condition suggested the form in which the subtle temptation came. He was hungry. He had taken no food since noon of the day before.

"What an absurdity," whispered this intriguing spirit. "You are the Messiah; a voice from the skies has told you so! But here you are in this desert place, hungry and tired and miles away from the people over whom you should be ruling by virtue of your divine Sonship. Really now, let us be sensible. Don't let this fantastic idea make a fool of you completely. Anyhow, the game isn't worth the candle. You may think the world is agonizing to be saved, but you are greatly mistaken. The world has a playful habit of making martyrs of its self-appointed saviors. There will be no exception in your case. If the world wants to be saved at all, it will certainly insist upon dictating the conditions. You are a man of rare talent and ability. Make those qualities get you the comforts, yes, the luxuries, of life. Let the poor and ignorant suffer—though as a matter of fact they do not suffer as much as you tender-hearted fellows imagine. They are poor and ignorant because they were meant to be that way. You cannot help them. So get yours while the getting is good. Don't risk suffering and hardship for the sake of what is sure to prove a thankless task in the end. At least you can make a comfortable living in the carpenter shop, and incidentally be the leading citizen of Nazareth; that is, if you do not care to aspire to a larger place. Be sensible!"

This was the temptation which Jesus later made graphic to his disciples by saying that the devil had dared him to command that a certain stone of the hillside should become bread. His early training then stood him in good stead. He hurled back at the tempter a saying from the Scriptures, "Man shall not live on bread alone." No, there is something higher than material things and material comforts. He who would truly live must feed his soul; and the bread for that hunger is the bread of human service and sacrifice, even though the people for whom that sacrifice is made do not or will not understand.

The testing that followed this first onset was far more difficult to meet. How long it was upon him the Carpenter did not know; but he must have wrestled with it several days. It was an insinuating thing, for it made the worse appear the better reason. Besides, the course it suggested was so obvious, conventional and respectable.

No question of his messianic mission was now raised. That had been settled in the earlier conflict. It was now a question of interpreting that mission and choosing the policy of its pursuit. He was the long-expected Deliverer of Israel. Therefore, he must prove himself a deliverer indeed. The people would expect it. Israel must be set free from her galling subjection to Rome. The tyrant must be deposed and his legions swept from the land which Jehovah had long since given to His chosen people.

There was but one way to do that, of course. Jesus must put himself at the head of an army. He must lead a revolution. He must restore the heroic tradition of David and the Maccabees. The people were ripe for revolt. For years they had writhed under the heel of oppression, while their shrines had been polluted and all they deemed holy had been defiled by heathen hands. They were bled white by the extortions of the conqueror. The land was being steadily drained of its wealth to fill the coffers of the renegade Jewish tax-collectors and enable the tyrant of the Tiber to wallow in licentious luxury. The menacing shadow of the Roman soldiery was everywhere, intimidating the desperate people and crushing without mercy the slightest symptom of rebellion. Surely no nation had ever been in such sore need of deliverance, and no nation was ever more ready for it. Let Jesus only announce himself and sound the tocsin of war. Such a proclamation would electrify the people and crystallize in a day the spirit which had only been waiting for some masterful leader to appear. He must use all the time-honored methods of warfare—craft, violence, treachery and intrigue. He must fight the devil with fire!

Something in the Carpenter's daring soul leaped in eager response to this challenge. Who could deny the bitter need of such retribution upon the heads of their pagan oppressors? Who could deny the sufferings of his people? Had not the ruffian Roman soldiers often struck down unoffending men and women in the streets of Nazareth, right under his very eyes? And did he not remember only too well how Joseph had had to rake and scrape every possible penny to meet the voracious demands of the tax-collectors? Surely, if he were the promised Deliverer of Israel, his duty was plain. And for a long time he wavered in the face of this challenge of what was surely the voice of humanity, mercy and justice.

But presently the revulsion came, and with it a flood of new understanding. This was not his Father's voice calling him. This was not the highway to the promised Realm of Heaven. However honeyed and enticing they might seem, these were the words of cruelty, hatred and blind retaliation, forces of evil which had shackled the hearts of men from the foundation of the world. It was not God speaking, but the Adversary, the Spirit of Satan. To heed this call would be to fall down and worship that Spirit of Evil and become his slave forever.

Such is the meaning of the symbolism with which Jesus later tried to describe this experience to his disciples; how the devil "lifted him up and showed him all the realms of the universe in a single instant; and the devil said to him, 'I will give you all their power and grandeur . . . if you will worship before me.' "

The Carpenter shuddered at the realization of the peril in which he had been standing. How plausible it had seemed, yet how devilishly false! And again out of the storehouse of childhood and youthful memory came leaping the words with which to fight the terrible temptation down. "It is written, You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone." The Deliverer of Israel must be a spirit of love and peace, not of vengeance and destruction.

Once more was his resolution tested during those fiery days. His messianic mission was now undisputed, and he knew in his heart that the spirit of it must be strangely unlike that of other world-conquerors. Neither violence nor vengeance could the Son of Man invoke in his conquest of the earth. The Carpenter was confirmed in this conviction. But how were the rest of mankind to be persuaded of it? How could his messianic claim be established?

This question opened the door to the most alluring temptation of all. It came clothed as an angel of light. It came in the guise of faith—faith in the power and guardianship of that God who had acknowledged him as His Son. And, moreover, in the very exercise of that faith he would achieve that without which his mission would be futile. He would make the people believe in him!

"Fine!" whispered this enticing spirit. "To you it has been granted to be the great Prophet of all time—and a different sort of prophet. Now act the part, and prove it. Be spectacular; do 'stunts'; nothing convinces the people like a sensational performance. God will take care of you and stamp the very seal of the Almighty upon your deeds. Miracles, miracles! That is what the world wants. Give them a demonstration of the divine power which has been bestowed upon you. Holy Writ itself has guaranteed your success:

> 'He will give his angels charge of you.
> They will bear you on their hands
> Lest you strike your foot against a stone.'

What greater assurance do you need?"

Little wonder that the only figure which Jesus found adequate for the expression of this fiendishly clever temptation was that of being carried to the pinnacle of the temple and there bidden to throw himself down. God would save him from injury; and, seeing that evidence of Divine protection, the people would accept and hail him as Messiah. It was a challenge to break all the laws in order to demonstrate that here was One over whom laws and precepts had no power.

But once again a remembered text brought the saving truth to the rescue. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Such a course would be impious and immoral. No, he could not do it. Like Elijah of old, who found light in those very mountain fastnesses, he must conquer not by earthquake, whirlwind or fire, but by the power of the still, small voice. He would wait for the light; he would take one step at a time; he would dare everything that duty involved from day to day, knowing that the care of God would sustain and comfort him.

"And after exhausting every kind of temptation the devil left him till a fit opportunity arrived." Jesus was soon to learn that these soul-racking struggles in the Wilderness were only premonitions of testing-times to follow all along the way. The same unworthy or less-worthy forces would tug at his heart in moments of weariness and despondency up to the very summit of Calvary. But now, with this battle ended and his foes put to flight, "angels came and ministered unto him."

White Captain of my soul, lead on;
I follow Thee, come dark or dawn.
Only vouchsafe three things I crave:
When terror stalks, help me be brave!
Where righteous ones can scarce endure
The siren call, help me be pure!
Where vows grow dim, and men dare do
What once they scorned, help me be true!

Now when evening came, when the sun set, they brought him all who were ill or possessed by daemons—indeed the whole town was gathered at the door. . . .

When he entered Capernaum again after some days it was reported that he was at home, and a large number at once gathered, till there was no more room for them, even at the door. . . .

Then he went out again by the seaside, and all the crowd came to him and he taught them. As he passed along he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-office; he said to him, "Follow me," and he rose and followed him. Now Levi was at table in his own house, and he had many tax-gatherers and sinners as guests along with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many of them among his followers. . . .

Jesus retired with his disciples to the sea, and a large number of people from Galilee followed him; also a large number came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, the other side of the Jordan, and the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, as they had heard of his doings. So he told his disciples to have a small boat ready; it was to prevent him being crushed by the crowd, for he healed so many that all who had complaints were pressing on him to get a touch of him.

—Mark 1:32, 33; 2:1, 2, 13-15; 3:7-10 (Moffatt)

III

FAME ON A FRAIL FOUNDATION

Genius as a household irritant—Peter and his mother-in-law—Jesus as Guest and Healer—In the synagogue—Opposition begins—Great popularity—The foundation crumbles.

Genius of whatever sort is apt to upset any well-ordered household. And that because genius simply cannot function according to a prescribed program. It is a law unto itself; while a household, if it is to be quiet, restful, orderly and efficient, must move on a fairly regular schedule. Meals must be on time, and those who eat them must be on time. The various duties pertaining to housekeeping must be performed in about the same way and at about the same hour, or the machinery will get out of gear and confusion will ensue. This simply means that there is no place in a well-ordered household where a genius will fit in with comfort. As a result many a splendid housewife has led a hectic life; that is, unless she has had the wisdom and grace to apprehend the situation and adjust herself to it.

About nineteen hundred years ago there was a home in Capernaum where these two factors, genius and order, had failed to make peace with each other. It was in that part of the town where the fisherfolk dwelt; for we must remember that Capernaum was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and that hundreds of its citizens earned a livelihood as fishermen. The little lake teemed with several kinds of fishes. Bethsaida was the name of that quarter, which means in Hebrew "Fisher-home." Most of the dwellings were pathetically poor, for their owners received very meager wages. But here and there rather more pretentious houses stood out above the others, these being the abode of the fish-merchants, the "captains of industry," who were able to hire servants to work for them and who acted as middlemen in marketing the catches of the individual fishermen.

One of these better places was the home of two brothers, Peter and Andrew, who were apparently fairly prosperous. We have reason to believe that the house really belonged to Peter. Peter was a married man, but we know nothing whatever about his wife. She was of that retiring sort who usually become more and more colorless the longer they live with such a fellow as this erratic, irritable and temperamental fish-merchant. Her mother was the real head of everything inside the front door. She managed the housekeeping, looked after the meals, and did what she could to keep her son-in-law straight.

For this Peter was a good deal of a trial. Perhaps it is overstating it to call him a genius; but he was a visionary, ever on the alert for some new prophet to whom he might offer his allegiance. Like all of his race, he was pining for political deliverance, and eagerly on the lookout for the possible deliverer. His business was good, though his frequent excursions into the politico-religious field often threatened to ruin it. His latest adventure at the time of which I speak had centered around John the Baptizer. The preaching of this fiery young man had captivated both brothers, and Peter and Andrew had attached themselves to him as disciples. The practical business of catching and marketing fish was left for the time being in the hands of their hired men, which is never a very good policy.

This displeased Peter's mother-in-law very much. Everything was running at loose ends while that day-dreaming fisherman went off on his crazy tangents. She had remonstrated with him a good many times; but his temper was as peppery as his mood was variable, so she had quit doing that. Often she had worried herself sick over it, developing a kind of nervous fever. And the more she fretted the more feverish she became. But on this particular day she had reached the limit of her endurance. Frequently Peter had come home bringing with him an unexpected guest. Sometimes these guests stayed several days; and more than once she had to hint rather plainly before they would take their departure. At least a half dozen times she knew that Peter had been victimized by these smooth-spoken pretenders.

Now he had done it again. As nearly as she could get the story from the household servants—for she was so vexed that she kept herself out of sight—this was another lunatic whom her precious son-in-law had picked up while sojourning with John the Baptizer. That was not quite the straight of the story, but it sounded plausible enough in view of past experiences.

They had come on Thursday. She steadfastly refused to look upon their new guest, leaving the servants to attend to his wants. Two nights past in this way. The resentful woman was vaguely aware that an unusual quiet had fallen upon the house, but she was too vexed to admit it or be touched by it. The third day was the Sabbath. Peter and his guest went early to the synagogue, leaving his mother-in-law to nurse her grievance and try to find some way to get the household back onto an even keel. She was in a real state of mind. In a couple of hours she had worked up one of her nervous fevers and had been obliged to go to bed.

And that was the situation when Peter and the others returned from the synagogue. A servant met them at the door and told them that the much-troubled woman was really very ill. She was tossing about feverishly on her bed. Peter and the Carpenter—for he was the new guest whose coming had precipitated the strained situation—exchanged understanding glances. Evidently they had been talking the matter over. Jesus acted with characteristic promptness. This woman would not see him, but he would go to her. Her distress was genuine, and it was caused by her very generosity of soul. She wanted to protect Peter from designing men, and she wanted to make his household a model of neatness and order. Misguided she might be in the present instance, but she was deserving of sympathy and help.

They walked straight to her couch. The woman opened her eyes and saw Jesus bending over her. At the moment she may not have realized that this was the guest whose presence she resented so bitterly. His eyes were fixed upon her with a look of serene and friendly sympathy. He did not smile; but his face somehow suggested a world where worry and fretful troubles cannot endure. She felt her pulse growing quieter, and she glowed to her finger-tips with a new sense of well-being. Jesus leaned over and took her hand, stroking it gently with his own cool fingers. His hands were rough and calloused by years of work at the bench, yet there was a healing, caressing, soothing quality in their touch. How trivial seemed the troubles which had vexed her into such a state of mind! And within half an hour her fever had completely subsided, her pulse was normal and her mind was at peace. Now she understood why everyone else in the place had been so uncommonly happy during the last two days, while she herself had been nursing her long-standing resentment. And soon she was directing the affairs of the household with all the grace of an accomplished hostess.

*

After the tense emotionalism which accompanied his spiritual struggles in those days in the hills of Judea had subsided, the Carpenter's mind turned at once to Nazareth. He could not remain at home any longer, but he must go back to his mother, explain the reason of his long absence and try to make her understand. So he set out at once. While passing through the region lying between Jerusalem and the Jordan he learned that John the Baptizer had been arrested and thrown into prison. John's disciples had scattered panic-stricken to their homes, and there was great excitement among the thousands who had been crowding to hear John preach. Spies infested the whole country, and Jesus knew that he must make haste or himself be apprehended as a disturber of the peace. Already he was a marked man, for it had been whispered about that some significant understanding existed between him and John. So he made all possible haste to the northward, following the route that roughly paralleled the Jordan River.

But when he reached the forks of the road at Scythopolis some impulse led him to continue on to the northward instead of taking the left-hand route which led directly to Nazareth. He was now approaching the cities that lined the shores of Galilee. Perhaps he wanted a glimpse of the blue, soothing waters of the sea after the turmoil through which he had passed. He was unhurried now. Making his leisurely way as the spirit listed, he went on until he came to the outskirts of Capernaum. Scores of fishermen were just coming in with their catches of the night before. Look! Could he be mistaken? Peter and Andrew, with the help of two or three hired men, were dragging their fish-laden net to the beach. He had surely seen those men before. They looked quite different in their scant working garb, but he could never forget their two faces. They had been among John's disciples at the Jordan.

The two men saw him at almost the same instant and their hearts leaped with mutual recognition. In him they would realize the hopes which John had not been able to fulfill. That moment they became his disciples; and impetuous Peter insisted that Jesus must make their home his headquarters while he carried his message to the country round about. That is how Jesus became a guest in the house presided over by the woman to whom housekeeping and Peter's welfare were matters of such great moment. On their way home two others joined the little group, John and James, who also were fishermen.

An immediate return to Nazareth was now out of the question. The matter had been taken out of the Carpenter's hands. It needed only that Sabbath day's experience in the synagogue in Capernaum to convince him of that. As a prepossessing looking visitor he had been invited to speak to the worshipers, as was the custom in the synagogues of those days. There was a man in the congregation who was mentally deranged. In the language of the day, he was possessed of a devil. Something in the word or manner of Jesus provoked this man to a hostile demonstration. He shrieked and created a disturbance. Whereupon Jesus fixed him with a stern and steady eye and bade the "unclean spirit" to come out of him. The effect was amazing. The man gave one loud cry and instantly became quiet. A kind of shudder ran through his whole being, after which he sat in sane silence in the presence of this mastering soul.

Instantly there was hubbub in the synagogue. Men gesticulated and wagged their heads. First in whispers, then in audible voice, excited comments flew from lip to lip.

"Did you ever see anything like that in your life?"

"Why, he even orders unclean spirits!"

"Yes, and what's more, he gets action. They obey him!"

Others shook their heads ominously, while dark looks gathered upon their faces. This thing was just a little too "raw" for a dignified synagogue service on the Sabbath day. Who was this young upstart, anyhow?

But the crowd as a whole were elated. As soon as the meeting broke up, more or less in disorder, they went flying with the news in every direction. And it was while that mood of serene power was upon him that Jesus had returned home and dispelled the fever of his unhappy hostess.

The high tide of popularity upon which Jesus was to ride for many weeks was now beginning to swell. In spite of the rigorous Sabbath quiet enjoined by the law, the report of what had happened that morning in the synagogue was whispered all over Capernaum. And as soon as the sun had set, signalizing the end of the Sabbath, the people began to gather. They brought all kinds of sick folks with them. They crowded Peter's house to suffocation; they stood around the outside and blocked the streets in every direction. They must see this wonder-worker from Nazareth. They must invoke his healing touch for their dear ones who were ill.

It was fortunate that Peter's mother-in-law had now become an enthusiastic devotee of this young prophet!

All his life the Carpenter had been aware of a certain gift which, for want of a better name, men call the "healing touch." With the consciousness of his new mission as the Revealer of God's kingdom had come a greater enduement of this power. Persons troubled in mind and tormented in spirit; persons who had become ill in body because of worry, fear and a host of other mental afflictions—such persons coming to him in a mood of trustful entreaty almost invariably were healed or greatly helped. Somehow his own radiant personality served as a link between their hungering lives and the healing life of God. Hence many of those who came crowding about him in this twilight hour went away thrilling and tingling with new life.

Likewise in the following days, as he went to and fro among the villages of all that region, this power of healing men's bodies and souls continued unabated. Likewise when he returned to Capernaum after this first preaching tour, again the house was fairly stormed by those who sought the touch of his hand. Multitudes besieged him, so much so that there was no opportunity to eat or sleep. Then it was that he resorted to the expedient of getting into a boat, pushing off a little way from the shore, and from that point of security speaking to the hundreds who, in their eagerness to get close to him, would otherwise have pushed him and his disciples into the water.

Those were the days of far-flung fame. His name was on every lip. Urgent invitations came from every part of the land. The people were in expectation, awaiting from day to day and with impatience the signal for the political revolution which he was everywhere supposed to be fomenting. Roman authorities were alert for the first gesture which might be interpreted as a challenge to their power.

But the Jews in authority in both church and state were suspicious of this flaming spirit. He was too radical. He did not exactly flaunt the conventions, but he indicated plainly enough that he considered other things of vastly greater importance. It was highly improper. It was such talk as his that weakened the church's hold upon the people! But the masses of the people, the rank and file, the multitudes who were carrying upon their backs the whole load of political and ecclesiastical tyranny, hailed and lauded his name. Here was a man who was doing something *for* them instead of laying added burdens upon their shoulders.

But the Carpenter knew from the beginning that this could not last. It could not last because it was not built upon the true foundation. This was a popularity owing entirely to the fact that the people had been *getting* something *from* him, something in the line of their lesser needs and prejudices. And they hoped to get more. A modern wit, not without a spice of cynicism, has defined gratitude as a lively sense of favors expected. This was the sort of gratitude that found expression in the Carpenter's enormous popularity. More and more it was borne in upon him that popular acclaim was the loudest when he was feeding and healing people's bodies, denouncing the Pharisees and scribes whom the people hated, and defying the Romans whom they feared and despised. They thought they had found in him a source of material goods as well as a spokesman for their prejudices.

But they had only scratched the surface. These obvious and somewhat sensational doings were mere episodes of his real mission, and they were wrongly interpreted. The people had not caught the glow or discerned the heart of his real message.

It was when he began to make *demands* upon them that their ardor cooled. When he called upon them to love their enemies, put meanness and vindictiveness out of their hearts, refrain from judging one another, give their highest loyalty to the cause of human brotherhood, live lives of fellowship, good will, and mutual forgiveness—when he demanded these things as conditions of citizenship in this new Realm of Heaven, his popularity drooped like a plucked flower in the sunshine. What? Love their enemies, whom they lusted to slay and destroy? Refrain from vindictiveness, be mollycoddles, in the face of their tormenters? Refrain from judging those who were continually passing judgment upon them? Be loyal to an impossible brotherhood made up of all sorts of people whom they despised? Exercise good will and forgiveness in a world seething with hate and suspicion and political turmoil? What was the man thinking about? Talk like that might do well enough in an ideal state; but they were facing a practical situation and it called for red-blooded men and courageous policies. We beg to be excused!

And fame's frail foundations collapsed under his feet.

This defection eventually drove away hundreds of those who had hitherto followed him with avidity. On one occasion, when he had spoken of the heavy cost which discipleship was sure to exact from them, putting it as he so often did in terms of vivid oriental symbolism, it looked as if the twelve chosen disciples were on the point of desertion. Some of them stood apart and argued in low tones among themselves. Jesus knew what they were talking about. A sensitive soul does not need to be told when the ties of devotion are strained or broken.

"Well," he asked, "are you going to leave me, too?"

They were confused and shamefaced. But Peter, quick on the trigger and impulsive as ever, answered Yankee-like by asking another question.

"If we leave you, to whom can we go? You speak words of eternal life."

From the day when he had taken him into his home at Capernaum, Peter had been just hovering on the periphery of the Carpenter's heart. Something there had lured and held him. Often he had seemed on the very point of grasping it. And he was still hovering, still reaching out, though the ineffable Thing had so far eluded him. So he at least would stand by.

"No," he repeated, "we are not going to leave you." But in his heart, he added, silently, "Nevertheless, I do not yet understand you or your mission."

The tide had now definitely turned. There was a resurgence of popular acclaim the day he entered Jerusalem for that last Passover feast. Crowds followed him waving palm-branches and shouting huzzas. But with a heavy heart he perceived that their enthusiasm was inspired by the same old mistaken hope. They expected him to become King. But the throne upon which he was to sit was that throne in the human heart of which the world did not yet understand. Even Peter, groping, impulsive Peter, had not yet caught the vision of a spiritual Kingdom; while all the hundreds for whom he had done so much turned against him or lapsed into cold indifference. Jesus was passing through the bitter experience shared by the shining-eyed idealists of all the centuries. Popular acclaim is for him who gives the people what they want; rejection and disdain for those who essay to give the people what they need.

The blackest hour of that black day on Calvary was when he recalled those who ought to have been there at the foot of the cross ready to suffer and die with him. Where was blind Bartimæus, and that other sightless soul, to whom he had given their vision? He had opened their eyes to see the glories of the world; but they were not there to look with pity upon his agony. Where were the men out of whom he had cast the devils of terror and fear and sent back to their loved ones with sane minds and exulting hearts? They were not there to exorcise the demons of hate who had nailed him to the cross. Where was the man with the withered hand, and the paralytic whom he had restored? Where were all of those who had pressed against him in the crowds that they might touch the fringe of his garment and be healed of their infirmities? Not one of them was there. Even Peter, who had sworn eternal fealty, had run away!

The torture of the nails and the torment of thirst were forgotten in this more exquisite agony of knowing himself forsaken by the very ones who had received the most at his hands. And his heart broke with the wailing cry, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani! My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

He came to earth one blue-skied day—
  He walked with world-men down the street:
The people stared in a wide-eyed way,
  Noting his wounded hands and feet.

Then they whispered and hurried by:
  Some of them mockingly jibed and smiled
When he stopped where buildings towered high
  To stroke the head of a ragged child.

"Out of the way," the world-men cried:
  "Hurry along," called one in blue:

Fame on a Frail Foundation

"You look like a man we crucified,
  But no . . . Oh, no . . . it was not you!"

"Have you the price of board and bed?"
  They hurled at him as nightfall neared,
And when he shook his thorn-scourged head
  The mob pressed close and laughed and jeered.

"Have you a house of bricks?" they called,
  "Or a chariot which runs alone—
A vault for silver, steeled and walled
  With blocks of mighty granite stone?

"Have you some other earth-made thing—
  A purse of coins or flying plane?
You who have called yourself a king—
  You must have prospered through your reign."

The night closed in—none gave a crust:
  I heard the wan Christ groan and say:
"Better my dark tomb in the dust
  Than the world today . . . than men today."

Leaving there he went to his native place, followed by his disciples. When the sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and the large audience was astounded. "Where did he get all this?" they said. "What is the meaning of this wisdom he is endowed with? And these miracles, too, that his hands perform! Is this not the joiner [carpenter], the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters settled here among us?" So they were repelled by him. Then Jesus said to them, "A prophet never goes without honour except in his native place and among his kinsfolk and in his home." There he could not do any miracle, beyond laying his hands on a few sick people and curing them. He was astonished at their lack of faith.

—Mark 6:1-6 (Moffatt)

*

IV

THE PERIL OF THE PREMATURE LAUGH

Fountain of the Virgin—The village gossips—A town-boy's notoriety—The division in Mary's household—Jesus comes home—The neighbors reject him—The premature laugh.

Every town has its center of gossip, whither the clacking tongues and the itching ears repair to publish and hear the latest sensation. In Nazareth that center was the spring to which all the families of the village came for water. It was and still is the only source of water for every household purpose. It gushed out of the foot of one of the hills which surrounded the village on every side. Today it is known as the Fountain of the Virgin, or Mary's Well. A sort of canopy of stonework has been built over it, and a wall of masonry some four feet high surrounds the entrance to this canopy. A flight of four stone steps, like an old-fashioned stile, affords an entrance to this enclosure. Perhaps it was very like that at the time of which we are speaking.

And here from time immemorial the women of the town have come, balancing their empty water-jugs on their heads. Filling these jugs was a leisurely process, and they must needs await their turn. So they sat around and talked. What an opportunity for gossip! It took the place of the modern newspaper, sewing circle, bridge club, afternoon tea and party telephone line. Everybody knew everybody else, and everybody's doings were subject to the most pitiless publicity.

*

On this particular morning it was evident that an unusual excitement prevailed. When Abigail, the chief purveyor of neighborhood news, arrived at the Fountain with her empty pitcher, a little knot of women had already gathered and were waiting for their jugs to fill. A glance at her face told them that she was bursting with important information. Indeed they had already had intimation of it.

But with true oriental precision the usual greetings were exchanged.

"May your day be happy," said Abigail.

"May your day be happy and blessed," responded the women, each bowing ceremoniously to the older matron.

One of them lifted her overflowing jug and set it to one side, while another vessel was put in its place. She was in no hurry to go, for she sensed something worth listening to. Abigail seated herself deliberately and cast a knowing look around the circle of expectant faces.

"Well," she said, "have you heard the latest about that crazy Carpenter?"

They had not—a fact which added greatly to her enjoyment.

"Well, Abner"—they all understood that Abner was her husband—"Abner went down to Capernaum day before yesterday. Or was it the day before that? I forget. And who should he encounter on the road but Mary, with both girls and two of her boys, James and Judas, I believe it was. Anyhow, I know it was James because of what he did afterwards. They were all going to Capernaum to find out for themselves about this excitement that Jesus has been stirring up down there. You know the things we have been hearing. Why, they even say he heals the sick and casts out devils. *I* always did think there was something uncanny about that fellow, myself. And since he came back from that wild-goose chase after John the Baptizer—thank goodness, they've got *him* in jail now!—he has been getting crazier every minute. He stayed away more than two weeks; and then, instead of coming on home and attending to his work as he should, off he goes to Capernaum and begins preaching just as John did. It does seem that folks never will learn anything from the experience of others. Mary looked just awful, Abner said. Of course she tried to let on it was all right; but he could see that she was just awfully worried. What mother wouldn't be?

"Well, when they got to town they found everybody *so* excited. Why, they hardly talked about anything else. And the first thing Mary and the rest of her family did was to inquire where Jesus was staying. James did the talking for them; and, you know, he actually seemed all puffed up because of the excitement his brother had caused. I'd a-been ashamed of it, myself. And, would you believe it?—he was staying in a place over where the fishermen live! Abner didn't want to seem curious, but he just couldn't help following along when Mary and the others started off that way. But, such luck! When he got somewhere near the place he lost sight of them in the crowd. He couldn't keep too close, you know. And *such* a crowd! Abner couldn't get within three hundred cubits of the house, the people were jammed in so. So he went away and attended to his own business downtown."

By this time the jugs of all those who had arrived before her were filled, so Abigail set her pitcher under the gurgling fountain. Her auditors were entranced, and the old woman was having the time of her life. She reseated herself upon the stone coping, and after a sententious pause, went on with her story.

"But he had better luck that night. At the inn where he stopped there was a man who had actually been in the house that day and heard everything that happened. It seems that Mary couldn't get near the place, either. But finally they managed to pass the word from one to another in the crowd that they were there and wanted to see Jesus. In fact, they sent word that he was to come on out and go back home with them. I just know Mary thinks he's crazy, too. Poor thing! How terribly she must feel! Well, after awhile some one outside passed the word in. The man who told Abner the story was standing right beside the fellow who repeated it. 'Your mother and brothers are outside and want to speak to you.'

"And, my dears, what *do* you think? Instead of rushing out, as you'd expect any decently behaved son to do when his own mother calls him, that Carpenter just stared at the folks around him, with a loony kind of look on his face, and said something about their *all* being his mother and his brothers, because they wanted to do the will of God, or some such crazy nonsense as that. And, you know, he *didn't* go out at all, but just went right on talking!

"Well, they all came back yesterday. It just happened that Abner saw them again on the road, and he said Mary looked just heartbroken. He tried to talk a little with them, as good neighbors should, but they didn't have much to say. But, in spite of all that had happened, that James was still acting as proud as a peacock. He seemed to think it was a big thing to have a brother that the whole country was talking about. And Hannah, too, the little minx, kind of tossed her head when Abner told her mother how sorry he was about it all. She seemed to like the publicity, too. My stars, there she comes now with the family water-jar! Well, I'll not humor her by saying a thing about it. Unless I miss my guess, the whole town will be laughing over it before night. Just see there, now. My pitcher has been running over for the last five minutes."

Very deftly for one of her years, Abigail balanced her pitcher upon her head, went down the stone steps and walked away, just as Hannah, the youngest of Mary's children, drew near. Constraint had fallen upon the little group. They responded somewhat stiffly to the girl's deferential greetings, picked up their water-jugs and hurried away, leaving her wondering and, perhaps, just a little amused.

Abigail proved to be both right and wrong. Everybody in Nazareth *was* talking about it before night, but all were not laughing. No doubt the majority did treat it as a huge joke. There is an impish something in all of us that relishes the sight of another's discomfiture; particularly if that other is a contemporary whom we have instinctively felt to be a bit superior to ourselves. It is a kind of salve smeared over our inferiority complex. And unless it is dominated quite rigorously by more generous sentiments, it makes us very disagreeable persons. It is the thing that puts the spice and the sting into malicious gossip. But some of the thoughtful citizens were inclined to be more serious.

And so their tongues wagged. All day long a stream of visitors flowed toward Abigail's house. Abner, flushed with self-importance, had taken the day off from his work so he could tell the story first-hand and see to it that his garrulous spouse did not overlook anything. He basked in the warm rays of an unwonted distinction. Was he not the first man in town to get the straight of the story and get it first-hand?

In the meantime this delicious scandal—for it almost amounted to that—had crowded out every other topic of conversation. The women fluttered from house to house, while the men congregated in the shops and at the street-corners. The oldest inhabitant could not recall a day when Nazareth had so thoroughly enjoyed itself.

This divided opinion prevailed right in Mary's own household. It was a puzzled and not altogether harmonious family circle that settled down that evening to talk it all over again. Besides the four brothers and Hannah, the two married sisters, Rachel and Miriam, who lived with their husbands and small children not far from the old home, had been called in for the conference. They could not help knowing that most of the town was snickering at their expense. No callers had dropped in that day to see Mary—a very unusual thing. There was something studied in such a sharp departure from the habitual custom. Hannah had reported upon the offish embarrassment of the women whom she had met at the well.

The boys had been around town and overheard various and sundry comments, which had probably not been meant for their ears at all. A curious and almost audible silence had fallen upon certain excited groups when the boys suddenly appeared. How eloquent such pauses are!

James did most of the talking. He was in the minority, but still clinging to the belief that there was something in the whole business which the others did not understand. He did not understand it himself, for that matter; but he could not see anything funny about it. His brother had suddenly become a famous man. Some of his sayings and doings were sensational, and those, of course, were the things that were being played up and talked about. The church authorities were mostly hostile, or lukewarm, but that was only what one might expect. Those fellows never did anything for the people themselves, and were the first to kick if somebody else tried. As he looked at it, the most serious fact was that the Roman officials were hot on his brother's trail as a revolutionary suspect.

"The thing that puzzles me," he remarked, breaking a silence which was becoming oppressive, "is that the busybodies and fuss-budgets around here can't see that some one has finally put the old town on the map. We have certainly had it coming long enough. Who ever heard of Nazareth before? Is it mentioned in the writings of Moses? No. In the Prophets? No.

Was any great man born here? No. Is Nazareth famous for *anything*? No. Just mention Nazareth anywhere from Carmel to Capernaum and you get a laugh. And now, when one of our own boys does give the old place a little advertising, nearly everybody in town joins in the laugh. It beats me."

Judas was only too ready to pick up the gauntlet.

"Mighty poor advertising, I call it," he growled. "The doings of a crazy man! I've been ashamed to be seen on the streets today. Everybody you meet has a smirk on his face, as much as to say, 'Well, how about your high-brow brother now?' "

At this point Mary interposed her quiet voice.

"Please don't talk like that, son. The people in Nazareth have always liked your brother. I know he has seemed rather odd. You know yourself how quiet and meditative he has always been. But who could be more thoughtful and kind? And it hurts me to have you call him crazy. Yes, yes, I know"—and she held up her hand to check another outburst from Judas—"I know these things he is doing now are a mystery. They make me afraid. I have always felt that he was destined for something high and incomprehensible. And, who knows? Perhaps he is —— Oh, if I only dared believe it!"

Then loyal Hannah put in her word.

"I just know it will come out all right. That wonderful brother of mine can't do anything wrong. And everybody isn't laughing; just remember that. Think of all those sick people he has helped so much! And I feel sure that he will be coming home before long. Then he will make everything plain to us."

"Yes," said Simon, speaking for the first time since the family conclave started, "some others think so, too. Old Enoch, the stone-mason, said the same thing. He didn't know I heard him. 'Well, you just wait,' he was saying to three or four other fellows who seemed to have nothing on their hands but leisure time, 'you just wait a few days. These young smarties who go away from home and get a reputation always come back to show off before the neighbors. You just wait.' "

"Well, he needn't bother on my account," said Judas, rather bitterly. "He has subjected us to quite enough gossip and ridicule already."

And so the conference came to an inconclusive end, with the family divided, four against three. But the three who took the brighter side were prompted by hope rather than by any settled conviction.

Then came that never-to-be-forgotten Sabbath in Nazareth. Their predictions had come to pass. Not many days after the day of which we have spoken, Jesus appeared in his native town. With the two or three disciples who had accompanied him he went straight to his mother's house. Joy and a curious restraint were mingled in their meeting. It was only a month since this dreamy-eyed Carpenter had forsaken his bench to seek out and hear John the Baptizer. But what a change in that brief time! There was an air of mastery about him. In his eyes was still that far-away look which had been there from childhood, only now it seemed to be fixed upon a definite goal. Already there were traces of suffering upon his face, for he was beginning to see how tragically the people were misunderstanding the Realm of Heaven he sought to reveal.

Gazing upon him as he stood before her in his indescribable poise and dignity, Mary felt the same clutching at her heart that had come that memorable day when she found him, a boy of twelve, in the Temple at Jerusalem. Mystically and mysteriously she sensed the realization of a cloudy dream which had hovered over her mind that day. But it was only for a fleeting instant. Straightway the tormenting doubt came back, and she turned abruptly to the business of making her guests comfortable.

During the two days that intervened before the Sabbath Jesus did not go abroad in the village. He stayed at home and rested with his disciples. Though they were consumed with curiosity, the villagers kept away from the house. A real feeling of awe had fallen upon them, albeit Jesus sensed in their attitude a distinct flavor of hostility. But on the Sabbath they all went to the synagogue. Early as it was, the place was filled, for everybody knew that Jesus would be there. He sat with the disciples and his brothers among the people.

In the usual order the service began. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength." And so on to the end of the Shema the worshipers joined in the recitative together. Then "the deputy of the congregation," the man chosen for that duty by the president of the synagogue, led in the prayers, known as the lifting up of hands; after which came the event for which everybody had been waiting.

The president of the synagogue arose.

"We have with us today"—and perhaps there was a delicate touch of irony in his voice—"our celebrated townsman, Jesus, son of Joseph, until recently the village carpenter. Capernaum and several other towns have been considerably stirred by his eloquence of late. I am sure we shall be honored if he will consent to read the lesson for the day and give us any message which he may have for us."

Without hesitation Jesus came forward, stepped upon the raised platform and took his place behind the reading-desk. The attendant went to the chest where the sacred rolls were kept, selected a volume and handed it to him. It was the prophecy of Isaiah. He unrolled it to the passage he wanted, and read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me:
For he has consecrated me to preach the gospel to the poor,

He has sent me to proclaim release for captives and recovery of sight for the blind,
To set free the oppressed, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

He handed the roll back to the attendant and sat down; for it was then the custom for the speaker to sit while interpreting the lesson or preaching. The atmosphere was vibrant with expectation.

"Today this scripture is fufilled in your hearing. My mission is that described by the prophet. The poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed have been forgotten by both church and state. Priests and scribes have lost themselves in a maze of ceremonials and hair-splitting definitions, while men's souls are lost and starving. The rulers of the state are interested only in the tribute they can exact. They wring taxes from the people, whose bodies are naked and hungry. And I am sent to speak the word which has been so long forgotten, the word of hope to the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. The Realm of Heaven is near!"

There was a stir in the congregation. It was evident that sentiment was divided. All were surprised at the eloquent earnestness of this young man who had found himself in what he believed was a prophetic mission. They all knew him well—had known him from childhood. Some were strangely moved, and thrilled with a nebulous hope. Others were quite frankly hostile. This young fellow was putting on airs. He was trying to lord it over his old neighbors who were just as good as he was.

Jesus searched their faces with his keen, disconcerting eyes.

"But you do not believe that I, a humble Nazarene like yourselves, am sent upon this mighty mission. You do not believe that one of your own townsmen can do this exalted thing. I know the words of your lips and the thoughts of your hearts. I have heard of the challenge which you have been tossing about in these last few days. 'Do some of the things here that you did in Capernaum. Work a few miracles in your home-town and we will believe in you!' Neighbors and friends, that is not the challenge of faith; it is the taunt of skepticism. And you are skeptical just because I grew up here among you, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, instead of coming from Jerusalem or Damascus. How strange it is"—and here his voice took on a note of sadness—"how strange it is that men never will believe that truth can be found in their very midst. It must come from afar! No prophet is ever welcome in his native place. In such an atmosphere of jealousy and doubt no prophetic word or deed can prevail."

This was too much. The uncanny truthfulness of the indictment enraged the congregation. Hastily the service was brought to a close and the people poured out into the street. Some of the hot-heads were for laying hold upon the Carpenter and inflicting physical chastisement upon him. But wiser counsel prevailed. He slipped away in the excitement, followed by his bewildered disciples. They did not return to Mary's home, but left the village immediately; and never again did Jesus set foot in Nazareth.

It was quite a long time before the angry crowd dispersed and went home. Vainly did some of the more punctilious remind their excited neighbors that such demonstrations were in poor taste on the Sabbath day. Rage was mightier than sabbatical conventions. The few who had feebly championed the Carpenter's cause were speechless, while the mockers of the last few days were enjoying their triumph.

"I guess you'll believe me now," exulted old Enoch, the stonemason. "Just like all of the young upstarts who get too smart for their own folks. I knew he'd come back, and I knew he'd make a fool of himself."

And he hobbled off down the street chuckling in derision.

The echo of that laughter has come down through the centuries. For the Carpenter it was the beginning of that which was to follow him all the way to Calvary. He heard it in blasphemous cacophony from his bitterest foes, the Pharisees. They countered the timid apology of his family, "He is out of his mind," with the derisive taunt: "Oh, no, not that! He is possessed by the spirit of Beelzebub. It is by the prince of devils that he does all these amazing things.

If you call that being out of his mind, get what comfort you can out of it." He heard it coming with nervous incredulity from the lips of some of those who actually loved him and desired to be loyal to his unearthly ideals. He had tried to tell them the secret of triumphant and abounding life, putting it once more in terms of vivid oriental paradox:

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,
And whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's
will save it."

He could not help hearing the subdued laughter of some in the company to whom words like that were incomprehensible nonsense.

But not to the Carpenter alone has come such heartbreaking experience. All those in the far-flung line of the pioneers have shared it. For such souls as these, those who sit in the midst of comfort and material things have no answer but a laugh. No one but fools would give up their comforts for the sake of silly ideals. Laugh at them, of course! When Francis of Assisi turned away from his wealth and his convivial joys to serve the poor and wretched, his boon companions shouted, "Ha! Ha! What a fool!" When Savonarola defied the flames of martyrdom for the sake of his austere gospel, fat priests and rollicking courtiers cried, "Ha, ha, what a fool!" When Martin Luther forsook his safe and assured cloister as a priest of Rome and hurled defiance into the teeth of greed and superstition, the startled world almost with one voice cried, "Ha, ha, what a fool!" A group of idlers were watching the strange devices of two boys who were trying to make a queer looking machine sail through the air; then they turned from the Wright brothers, looked one another in the eye and shouted with delight, "Ha, ha, did you ever see two such fools?" And when the rustics along the Sangamon heard that a certain lank rail-chopper had taken up the study of law, they slapped one another on the back and made great jubilation. "Abe Lincoln studyin' law! Ha, ha! What *do* you know about that?"

But that laugh is always premature.

Time may be slow, but it is inexorable. History may seem to lag, but the page always turns. And the recording Angel who took down the raucous laughter echoing from Nazareth to Capernaum and Jerusalem in those far-off times finds bewildering things to write down today. Everywhere are temples lifting the once-despised cross to the skies. In every tongue is heard the chanting confession, "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." From altars innumerable floats up the incense of worship; while statues, libraries and the very thought of the world attest the stupendous miracle which has been wrought.

Laughter has given way to adoration.

⁂

Yet perhaps I have not stated it quite accurately. Adoration? Yes, maybe, if it does not impose too heavy conditions. Perchance indifference is the better word. Only the other day a mourning company stood around the still form of G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, the man whom the soldiers during the war affectionately called "Woodbine Willie," because he understood them so well. In three poignant stanzas he has painted the picture of the world today in its attitude toward the once-derided Carpenter. Substitute any other name you please for Birmingham. The only possible difference would be a slight change in the rhythm.

When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged him on a tree,
They drave great nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;
They crowned him with a crown of thorns, red were his wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed him by,
They never hurt a hair of him, they only let him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left him in the rain.
Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do,"

And still it rained the winter rain that drenched him
through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul
to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.

Then he made a tour round the villages, teaching. And summoning the twelve he proceeded to send them out two by two; he gave them power over the unclean spirits, and ordered them to take nothing but a stick for the journey, no bread, no wallet, no coppers in their girdle; they were to wear sandals, but not to put on two shirts, he said. Also, he told them,

"Wherever you enter a house, stay there till you leave the place. And if any place will not receive you and the people will not listen to you, shake off the very dust under your feet when you leave as a warning to them."

So they went out and preached repentance; also they cast out a number of daemons and cured a number of sick people by anointing them with oil.

—Mark 6:7-13 (Moffatt)

*

V

COMRADES OF THE ROAD

On the dusty highway—Thaddæus and Simon the Zealot—What is the Kingdom?—What are unclean spirits?—The disciples' real mission—In Zadok's house—On the house-top—Unclean spirits cast out.

The mid-afternoon sun was very hot. The thin whisper of a breeze from the unruffled bosom of the lake scarcely mitigated the sweltering heat. A stillness hung over the landscape, for every living thing which did not have to be on the move had sought shade and slumber. The villages clustered along the great high-road seemed literally asleep, with only here and there a human creature in evidence. Perhaps a restless dog could be seen now and then sniffing around the doorways and corners of the houses. It was really too hot for exertion of any kind.

But there was movement on the highway itself. The pulse of trade between Damascus and the marts of the west and south could not stop just because the weather was hot. Caravans crawled lazily along. Heavily laden camels careened awkwardly from side to side. Donkeys with burdens far bulkier than themselves barely kept in motion; while their drivers were obviously indifferent as to whether they made headway or not. For this was the main trade-route leading from Egypt and the ports of the Mediterranean to Damascus and the famous bazaars of that ancient city. At this particular segment the highway ran along parallel with the shore of the Sea of Galilee, with rich plots of grain and vineyards spreading their panorama on the opposite side. In both directions parties and caravans crept along, while clouds of dust rose from the hot sands and hung suspended in the air along the whole length of the road.

Thaddæus wiped the perspiration from his face for perhaps the tenth time in as many minutes.

"Whew! This heat is awful. And the dust is worse. I wonder how much farther we have to go? If we don't arrive pretty soon, I'm going to look for a shady spot and rest awhile. How about you, Simon?"

Simon waited a full half-minute before speaking. There was a cloud upon his face and a note of resentment in his voice.

"For my part, I'd rather never have started. Trying to walk alongside all this traffic in weather like this is bad enough; but such a wild-goose chase as ours is even worse."

"Really, Simon, I think you have the wrong idea of what the Master is trying to do." Thaddæus spoke slowly, and he was choosing his words with care.

"And I think, moreover, that he has sent us out upon this mission just for the sake of helping us to understand it. We can learn to do only by doing, you know."

"But, Thaddæus, think of the instructions he gave us. Take no extra clothing, he said, no money and only one pair of sandals. That, of course, is not so strange, for we shall be gone only two or three days. Probably there are good souls in these villages who will not let us starve. But consider what he told us to do. We are to anoint the sick with oil and cast out unclean spirits."

"Yes, those were his instructions."

"But the utter impossibility of it, Thaddæus! I admit that Jesus can do these things himself. It is amazing how he has healed the sick and driven out devils. But we cannot do it. Of that I am certain."

Thaddæus hesitated a moment. The opportunity he had been awaiting was now at hand. He had wanted to talk with Simon very frankly, but he preferred to wait until Simon himself had opened the way. Now he had done it, and Thaddæus must be careful not to bungle his opportunity.

These two men, it should be explained, had struck up a close friendship from the very day they had been called to be disciples. They were of strikingly different temperaments, which perhaps accounts for the mutual attraction. Thaddæus was quiet and meditative. Like so many of the other disciples, he was a fisherman. Fishermen, by whatever device they seek to snare their finny prey, have lots of time for thinking, and those of a philosophic turn of mind ponder many problems in the silence. Out in his boat upon the bosom of the Sea of Galilee, with the stars looking down and little waves whispering to one another among the shadows, Thaddæus had entertained many long, long thoughts. Of course he had responded eagerly when Jesus called him. Maybe some of his dreams would now come true.

But Simon was passionate and impulsive. He came from a town back in the hills not many miles from Nazareth. He was a hot patriot and partizan of his people, taking literally the long-cherished promise to Israel that the kingdom would some day be restored to them. He was one of those ardent spirits who wanted to take that kingdom by storm. It was the Master's use of the phrase in his teachings, "the kingdom of heaven," which had led him to become one of his disciples. And, from the first, because of this impatient tumultuousness, as well as his former affiliations, they had called him Simon the Zealot. And because of that same characteristic, no doubt, Thaddæus the Thoughtful had been attracted to him, and they became fast friends.

But Thaddæus had quickly perceived that Simon utterly misunderstood what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of Heaven. He had no right perception of the spirit through which that kingdom was to be achieved and no comprehension of the methods to be employed. He had wanted to talk this matter over with Simon, and had been waiting for him to make the proper opening. Now it had come.

"Simon," he said, "what led you to become a disciple of our Master?"

"My desire to see the throne of David again set up in the land. It has been long promised that the Deliverer of Israel shall come and strike off the yoke of our oppressors. I thought Jesus was to be the fulfillment of that promise."

"Do you doubt it now?"

"Forgive me, Thaddæus, but I'm afraid I do. I thought he was to be a fighter and a leader of fighters. Instead, I find him a pacifist, advocating non-resistance. I can imagine no greater folly. The Roman will trample us into the earth if we do not rise up and resist his cruel power."

"You belonged to the sect of the Zealots before you came with us, did you not, Simon?"

"I did indeed, and right proud I am of that fact. I am one of the followers of Judas the Galilean, who was martyred in resisting the Roman tyrant nearly forty years ago. The Emperor had ordered that the Galileans should be enrolled for taxation and tribute. Judas gathered a band of patriots around him, and they fought with the soldiers who had been sent out to enforce the decree. Judas was overpowered, and he and his companions were put to a horrible death.

But others caught their spirit; and down to this very day the Zealots are keeping the flame of their patriotism alive in the land. Hundreds have been slain, but other hundreds have stepped into the ranks, answering the call of their brothers' blood crying out to them from the ground."

A glitter came into Simon's eyes as he spoke, and his voice trembled with fanatical fervor.

Thaddæus responded in quiet, measured tones, striving to avoid any note of sharp disagreement or protest.

"But, Simon, do you think our liberation can be won that way? Even supposing that physical power and bloodshed are proper weapons to employ, what can we hope to do against Rome? Against the legions of the Emperor we are as helpless as babes."

"God will fight for us, as He did in the days of the Maccabees."

"No, Simon, that is not the way, and our Master knows it right well. Hatred and injustice and every other unclean spirit must be cast out of men's hearts before men can be free—free from the tyranny of others or the tyranny of their own misguided passions. Pitting hatred against hatred will avail us nothing. It only perpetuates hatred from one generation to another. And I am fully persuaded that it is our Master's mission to reveal this truth to the world. This is the good news he is sent to proclaim. He is beginning to build the Kingdom of Heaven by driving out unclean spirits from the hearts of individual men and women. And surely it can begin in no other way. His is not the kind of kingdom of which the scribes tell us in their interpretations of the Law and the Prophets. At first I understood it just as you did; but as I have listened to the Master's words, watched his ministry to the sick and tormented in spirit, and felt the throb of his yearning, tender heart, a new light has come to me."

Simon stopped stock-still in the road and looked at his companion. Thaddæus returned his gaze steadily, while the shadow of a smile played over his thoughtful face.

"Do you mean, Thaddæus, that hatred is what Jesus meant by unclean spirits?"

"Hatred, yes; and jealousy, and greed, and avarice; envy, covetousness, arrogance, and a host of other unclean passions that fester in our hearts. I am sure that is what he meant."

"Then he did not mean demons who enter into men's bodies and make them sick?"

"I am a little puzzled about that, too, Simon. Our learned men tell us that demons are the cause of all our sicknesses. They say that we can be healed only by driving out these foul spirits. You remember that the Master often speaks to sick folk as if he were talking to some spirit inside that can understand him. And very often, too, it does seem as if something comes out of them."

"Well, if all this isn't the work of the demons, what is it?"

"That I cannot tell, Simon. The question has been constantly in my mind the last few days. I have been thinking about some of the people who have come to the Master asking for all kinds of help. Some of them want to be healed of their diseases; some want advice about their personal affairs; some want him to settle their quarrels for them. But I have noticed that he always tries to get at what they are thinking about, the desire or ambition that is uppermost in their thought. You remember the man who came to him the other day, the man who had a quarrel with his brother?"

"The one who wanted an estate settled? Yes, I remember him."

"That's the one. His brother, he said, refused to make a fair division. He wanted Jesus to settle the dispute. But he refused to interfere. Said that was not any part of his work. Instead, he asked the man a few questions, and we could soon see that he was a grasping fellow who wanted more than his share of everything. Jesus told him plainly that he was covetous, and that he must beware of that spirit. You remember he used that very word. He called covetousness a spirit."

"Yes, I remember, Thaddæus; and surely that is an unclean spirit, isn't it?"

"There can be no doubt of it, Simon, whether it is an actual demon that causes it or not. Think of all the evil it makes in the world. And that sick woman who came yesterday morning asking for help. Jesus told her that her sickness was caused by hatred. And after a while she confessed that for years she had been hating her own sister. She broke down and told him all about it. And when she went away to find her sister and be reconciled, she seemed like a different person. Her illness was gone. And there is Matthew, one of our own number. He was a greedy tax-collector, taking all the graft he could get his hands on. Jesus somehow drove out that unclean spirit of greed; and now Matthew fairly adores him. Haven't you noticed how eagerly he writes down the Master's wonderful sayings? How I wish I could write that way!"

A new light began to break in Simon's face. Always a headlong enthusiast, always going wholeheartedly into the business of the moment, he was now surrendering in the same impulsive fashion to this dawning idea.

"I've got it, Thaddæus! I understand now. I see what he means by the Kingdom of Heaven, and I see that this kingdom can never come for any of us until our unclean spirits are cast out."

His voice took on a note of humility, and the rest of the speech was spoken almost as if to himself.

"And I know now what has been the matter with me. I have been full of the spirit of hatred and vindictiveness. I have hated every one, Roman, Greek or Phœnician, whom I suspected of dealing harshly or unjustly with our nation. I hated them and wanted to wreak vengeance upon them. I thought that Jesus was going to raise an army and become the liberator of Israel, so I followed him. How terribly I was mistaken! His liberation is so different and so much greater."

Thaddæus took Simon's arm and drew him back a few feet from the road. While they were talking men had kept passing by singly and in groups. Now a considerable caravan was approaching, and they must make room for them. But Simon was scarcely aware of the movement.

"Why," he asked, in puzzled wonderment, "why did the Master permit *me* to follow *him*? And why did he send me on a mission like this when I understood so little of what it meant? How could a man with such an unclean spirit as mine hope to exorcise the unclean spirits of other men? I am amazed and ashamed."

"Our Master is a wise man, Simon. As I said a moment ago, he no doubt sent us on this mission in order to prove us and clarify our own minds. He knew very well that we would have to search our own hearts deeply before we undertook to minister to other seeking hearts."

"Do you think that is why he sent me out, Thaddæus, and with you?"

"I am sure of it, Simon. He would have sent you with me in any event, for I would have insisted upon having you with me."

"But I cannot do it, Thaddæus. I am fairly dazed at what has come over me."

"Perhaps that is all the Master hoped for this time. Perhaps it is enough for now that our own minds have been so illumined. But we need not be anxious about that. Let us meet the task as it comes." He pointed with his staff down the road. "I feel sure that village half a mile yonder is the one to which we were sent. We were to look for Zadok's house, were we not?"

They walked on until they came to the outskirts of the village in question. There they paused in front of a small house, where a sleepy-looking boy of ten years or so was sitting drowsily in the shade.

"Will you tell us, lad, which is the house of Zadok?" said Thaddæus.

The youngster scarcely roused himself enough to reply. He pointed sleepily down the road.

"Big house—with the court," he said, and closed his eyes again.

Three minutes later the comrades were standing in front of the only place in sight which answered to the somnolent description.

The sweltering heat of the afternoon had given way to the coolness of the night. The sun had been down for more than three hours, and the stars sparkled like diamonds. Thaddæus and Simon were sitting together on the housetop. How delicious the air, and what a haven was this they had found after their dusty journey. Zadok had received them graciously. He had seemed a bit surprised when the travelers appeared at his door, but he hesitated not a moment in offering the hospitality of his home. He knew that the reason of their visit would presently be disclosed. He called a servant who quickly brought a basin of water and washed the dust from their tired feet, wiping them carefully with a towel. After they had rested for an hour, Zadok had food set before them. They ate and drank with relish. Then, for more than two hours, they talked earnestly with their host, endeavoring to convey to him the meaning of their curious mission.

Zadok was quick to understand. Jesus himself had passed through the village some eight days before, and Zadok had listened earnestly to the talk he had given to the people who had crowded about him in the streets. He had watched with amazement the strange power of this prophet over certain sick and troubled minds among the villagers. And now he was glad to have two of his disciples in his own house. Some of the radiance of that flaming spirit seemed to emanate from these comrades who had been sent forth to enlarge the field of the prophet's mission. Zadok eagerly offered to do everything possible to give them access to his friends and neighbors. Then he had the sojourners conducted to the housetop where a tent had been spread over the couches they were to occupy for the night.

Simon was the first to break the silence.

"A gracious host and a gentle spirit is our friend Zadok."

"You speak truly," said Thaddæus. "I had expected a welcome, for we had been told something of his character. But had we been princes we could not have been more cordially received. How strange it seems, for Zadok did not know we were coming."

"Did not our host tell us that he is interested in the fishing trade?" asked Simon.

"Yes, he has two boats, and they go daily to Capernaum to market the fish. But I think he was once a potter by trade. Did you not see the wheel? And I judge that he sometimes turns out a cruse or a jug even now, for the clay looked as if it had been lately replenished."

"No doubt, Thaddæus, that he does so. But there must be small demand for pottery in a village like this. Probably that is why he has taken up the fishing trade. His house is better than those of his neighbors, too. See what a large court this is that we are looking into."

"Yes, and I suppose that added room yonder was built for the son who looks after the fishing business for him. Moreover, our friend Zadok is learned far beyond most of the people. Did you not see the writ-ing things there in the corner as we were at supper?—wax tablets, sherds of pottery, and I am quite sure there was a roll of papyrus, too."

"Well, that is to be expected of the man who leads the service in the synagogue and often reads the scroll for the day. Probably the villagers frequently come to him for advice. And he observes the things of the Law, for I saw the cases containing the holy words nailed to the doorpost as we were coming in."

There was silence for several minutes. The only audible sound was the lapping of waves on the lake shore and the distant barking of a dog. The comrades were both lost in thought. Suddenly Simon spoke in his impetuous way.

"Thaddæus, I have been thinking hard since our conversation this afternoon. I know I was rather absent-minded when we were talking with Zadok. I'm sure I understand now what the Master means by the Kingdom of Heaven; and I'm sure it can never begin to come until the unclean spirits are driven out of the hearts of men. That very thing has come to pass in my own heart this day. But I am fairly terrified at the thought of trying to demonstrate it with others. It is all so new and strange. I simply cannot do it—yet."

"Let us not be anxious about that, Simon," said Thaddæus affectionately. "I am fearful, too, but so far the way has opened as fast as we were ready to walk in it. As I said this afternoon, perhaps all the Master hopes for us at this time is that we shall get command of ourselves. Zadok will invite his friends here tomorrow. Beyond peradventure there will be a considerable company. There will be sick souls and bodies among them, and many of what we now understand as unclean spirits. I will try to tell them some of the things which Jesus has taught the people as we have gone about through the villages with him. It will be but poorly done, I know. Then, if you are moved to add some word to mine, well and good. Speak as the spirit gives you utterance. If not, just sit beside me and feel in your heart the truths I am trying to utter. For these people are as sheep without a shepherd."

Simon gave silent assent to this plan. Presently they sought the beds which had been prepared for them and soon fell asleep.

It was a typical company that gathered in the court of Zadok's house the next morning. It was an eager company—and pathetic; such as one might expect to see in a hamlet where most of the people lived precariously from day to day by means of their tiny gardens, their meager trades and the fish captured from the lake. Mothers came with their children. Most of them were tired, and with hopeless faces. Some of the men were there, too, for this was an occasion important enough to warrant leaving their work for an hour or so. The whole village had buzzed the night before with news of the strangers at Zadok's house. Everyone who could come had eagerly accepted the invitation to hear them speak. Their hearts were in expectation; for the wistful hope of Israel had been fanned into a new flame by the teachings of the man who had sent these sojourners among them.

According to his promise, Thaddæus spoke first to the people. In words as simple as their daily lives he told them the story of how Jesus had begun his mission; how he had gone down to the lower Jordan valley to hear John the Baptist, and had been baptized by him; how he had returned to his own country aflame with the message of a present Kingdom of Heaven; and how he had called the disciples to join him one by one, concluding with the story of how he himself had first heard Jesus and responded to his irresistible appeal. Through his talk he wove as it were with a thread of gold some of the most precious of the Master's sayings, especially those in which he bore witness to the love of God for simple souls like these before him.

Thaddæus had been seated while speaking, with the people gathered in a semi-circle in front of him. Simon sat on a rug so close as to be within reach of his comrade's hand. When Thaddæus had finished he looked in Simon's direction. Simon was on his feet in an instant. It was evident that he must stand to speak the words that were clamoring in his brain for utterance.

He began almost incoherently, but in a moment or two his sentences were coming as clear as a bell. His theme was the revelation which had come to himself in grasping the truth which Jesus had been sent to reveal and preach. And there is no form of address so effective as that couched in the first person, if the speaker is sincere and honest, uttering the words that come flashing white-hot out of the crucible of a first-hand experience. It was a confession of the years he had wasted while hating his enemies and plotting vengeance upon them, and of the passions which had literally burned in his heart while he impotently sought their destruction. He told how he had become a disciple of the Master under the impression that Jesus was destined to be a mighty military conqueror, bringing the world into subjection to the rule of Israel. And then of the flash of light that had come to him on the road the day before while bewilderedly trying to fulfill a mission which he did not yet comprehend.

"And now, friends"—he leaned toward the breathless people, his face aglow and with outstretched hands—"it is all so simple, clear and beautiful. The Master gave us authority over unclean spirits; but not until we came within sight of your village yesterday did I understand what these unclean spirits are. They are our hatreds, angers, and jealousies, and the poisoned minds in which we plot evil against one another. They are greed, and avarice, and our mean clutching after things which do not belong to us of right and justice. They are the spirits of malice, gossip and slander, in which we bring blight upon each other and misery to all. They are the spirits of prejudice and cruel judgments, in which we ascribe to others the meanness that cankers in our own breasts. These are all unclean spirits. We have been given no magic wand with which to conjure them out of your lives, no mysterious word of power that will bid them begone. We can only bear witness to the power that will subdue them—love, pity, forgiveness and good will. Until this power cleanses our hearts of all that foul brood, as the sunlight cleanses the earth of the shadows of the night, until then we shall have no peace and the Kingdom of Heaven cannot come into our lives. The Master told us also to heal the sick. In this way only can we do it. Go to those whom you have hated—maybe they are of your own blood and kin—go to those against whom you have harbored thoughts of vengeance, and seek forgiveness. If you have injured another, if you have lied about your neighbors, if you have taken that which is not your own, make restitution and strive to expiate your wrong by words and deeds of kindness. Then, it may be, new health and strength will come to you, and the joy of God's kingdom will be yours. It is so wonderful, my friends! So easy—and yet so very, very hard!"

The comrades spent the rest of the day in a kind of ecstasy, an ecstasy in which many of the villagers joined. For they had done as Simon had entreated. And on the morrow, when they came again to the place where Jesus was awaiting them, Simon fell on his knees before him, and cried: "Master, dear Master, the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Jesus looked down into his enraptured face, and said: "Would God that all the others knew it as well as you do, Simon."

* * *

Now this came to the hearing of king Herod, for the name of Jesus had become well known; people said, "John the Baptizer has risen from the dead, that is why miraculous powers are working through him"; others said, "It is Elijah," others again, "It is a prophet, like one of the old prophets." But when Herod heard of it he said, "John has risen, the John I beheaded." For this Herod had sent and arrested John and bound him in prison on account of his marriage to Herodias the wife of his brother Philip; John had told Herod, "You have no right to your brother's wife." Herodias had a grudge against him; she wanted him killed but she could not manage it, for Herod stood in awe of John, knowing he was a just and holy man; so he protected John—he was greatly exercised when he listened to him, still he was glad to listen to him. Then came a holiday, when Herod held a feast on his birthday for his chief officials and generals and the notables of Galilee. The daughter of Herodias went in and danced to them, and Herod and his guests were so delighted that the king said to the girl, "Ask anything you like and I will give you it." He swore to her, "I will give you whatever you want, were it the half of my realm." So she went out and said to her mother, "What am I to ask?" "John the Baptizer's head," she answered. Then she hurried in at once and asked the king, saying, "I want you to give me this very moment John the Baptist's head on a dish." The king was very vexed, but for the sake of his oaths and his guests he did not like to disappoint her; so the king at once sent one of the guard with orders to bring his head. The man went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a dish, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it they went and fetched his body and laid it in a tomb.

—Mark 6:14-29 (Moffatt)

*

VI

A WOMAN'S TERRIBLE REVENGE

Varus the Roman—A family quarrel—Herodias' intrigue—Her bloody request—The birthday banquet—Salome's dance—Her request—Death of John the Baptizer—End of Herod Antipas.

Varus was a handsome fellow, thirty-five years old, tall, square-shouldered and proud of his physique. But he was even more proud of being a Roman soldier. His uniform, spotless and resplendent, set off his fine figure superbly. His spear was polished to the utmost, as also were the metal insignia of the Empire upon his helmet. There was a look of conscious superiority upon his face, sardonic and half-contemptuous, as befitted one whose business it was to help keep a despised and turbulent people in subjection.

But at this moment other emotions were registered upon his somber countenance. He was listening intently to a conversation going on behind the door he had been set to guard, and what he overheard was troubling him. A woman's voice, sharp, imperious, demanding, with now and then a man's soothing, hesitant replies, came clearly to his ears. The woman was insisting upon something which the man was unwilling to grant. But it was evident that he had been more than once almost on the point of yielding. Varus stood with his ear close to the portal, every nerve on edge, but at the same time keeping a sharp lookout lest anyone should catch him eavesdropping.

"But I tell you, Herodias, I cannot do it. The man is a fanatic, and he has given us great provocation. I admit all that. But there is something about him—he fascinates me horribly—sometimes I am almost afraid of him. Yes, he's dangerous; I know that, too. But I can't put him to death, Herodias, really I cannot."

There was venom in her voice as she made reply, hissing the words between her teeth.

"Herod Antipas, you are a coward! You are worse than a coward—you are a cad!"

"You are cruel, Herodias. Cruel and unfair."

"I am not cruel. I am simply asking what any insulted, outraged woman has a right to ask of her husband. And you call that unfair!"

"Ah, that's the point. And that's what makes me afraid. This man insists that I am not your husband, that you are not my wife. He says you belong to my brother Philip, and that we are living together in sin. And the way he says it makes me tremble."

"Since when have you become so sensitive, Herod Antipas? As if you have not the right to take me if you choose, and if I choose to be taken! Are you not the son of Herod the Great, ruler of Perea and all Galilee, by grace and power of the Emperor? And afraid of a half-crazy man from the desert! Let a fellow like that dictate your private affairs and scare you like a rabbit! You, who may yet be a king if we play the game shrewdly enough. I am ashamed of you, Herod Antipas!"

There was unutterable contempt in these words, spoken in tones which had dropped into a vibrant contralto. Varus felt rather than saw the finger of scorn pointing at the distracted man in front of her.

"But, my dear, you accuse me of being afraid of this man. I am not—exactly. Anyhow, is that any worse than being tormented by him, as you are? If, as you say, he is crazy and uncouth, why do you pay any attention to what he has said? You are Herodias, the consort of the governor of Perea and all Galilee. Forget it!"

"Forget it? Forget how he insulted me there in the sight and hearing of hundreds of people? And you had not the courage to lift a finger. Have *you* forgotten *that*, Herod Antipas?"

"No, Herodias, I have not forgotten it. Neither have I forgotten how that crowd sympathized with John in what he said to you and me. Had it not been for the guard we had taken along they would have stormed our chariot and mobbed us. The people think he is a prophet. That is another reason why I cannot, dare not, have him killed."

The woman's voice now came muffled, as if she had buried her face in her hands. Hysterical resentment and outrage trembled in every syllable.

"Oh, I shall remember it forever! We had gone down there to the river-side to be amused, to see this fanatic from the desert whom everybody was talking about. The frowsy, gaping people, listening to a half-naked, frowsy, wild-eyed man. They were sullen and resentful when our chariot drove in among them. And then that awful word! It rings in my ears and tortures me day and night."

Her voice rose to a maddened shriek.

"He looked straight at me, the monster, and pointed his finger at me, and called me—he called me—a harlot! Because I was with you. Because I left Philip in Rome, two years ago—you begged me to!—and came to live and rule with you in Galilee. Right there in the presence of all that mob of dirty Jews he called me that awful name. Me, Herodias, wife of a prince! And what did you do, Herod Antipas? What did you do but drive away, with your cowardly tongue cleaving to the roof of your mouth?"

"But, my dear, listen to me. I later had him arrested, did I not? And is he not secure in the dungeon, here, now, in this very castle?"

"Yes, and you go down there every day and talk with him. And you always come back with a sick look on your face like a moonstruck calf. You ought to strangle him for his insult to me. Have you a spark of manhood in you?"

"Herodias, my dear ——"

"Oh, don't 'my dear' me! You are a joke. And what you call your love for me is another joke. If you cared for me at all, you would long ago have avenged me upon this dirty vulgarian."

"But the man is sincere, Herodias. When he spoke to you that day, after first denouncing me—you remember that, don't you?—he was speaking what he felt was the truth. He did not think of it in terms of an insult to a woman. He was burning with zeal for what he believed to be justice and righteousness. Granted that his zeal was misdirected, was there not something heroic about it, after all? Besides, Herodias, even though I would avenge the woman I love, I dare not have John put to death. I am afraid of the people. He has many followers, and they may start a revolution."

For a brief second no word was spoken. Then came the voice of Herodias, tingling with contempt and scorn unutterable.

"And for this I deserted Philip and left Rome! For this shuddering carcass with the soul of a craven! Immortal gods, why did I ever do it?"

Varus heard her retreating footsteps running across the room. Then there was silence, and he knew that Herodias had flung herself into her inner chamber. A moment later Herod Antipas laid his hand upon the door-latch. Varus sprang instantly to attention beside the door. When the tetrarch stepped out into the corridor, the well-trained legionnaire was standing erect, eyes to the front, his smooth face as expressionless as a sphinx.

The Roman stood thus for at least five full minutes. Then he heard a faint rustling within and knew that Herodias had come out of her inner chamber. His posture relaxed and he turned and faced the door. He hesitated an instant, then gave a peculiar, almost inaudible knock. Instantly and noiselessly the door swung open and he stepped inside. The room was in half-shadow, for by this time it was sunset. Herodias stood with her hand still on the latch. As soon as Varus had crossed the threshold, she closed the door again and stood with her back against it. She spoke hurriedly and with emotion.

"Varus, the time has come for you to prove your love for me. Will you do what I ask of you?"

"Can you doubt it, my queen? Why else did I come from the Imperial City to this barbarian land? Did you not ask me to come as your personal guard, and did not your eyes promise me my reward in due season? When, oh, when is that promise to be fulfilled?"

Impetuously he extended his right arm as if to sweep her into his embrace, his left hand still clutching his gleaming spear. Herodias craftily eluded his eager gesture.

"No, no, not now, Varus. Be patient. In due time I will keep my promise to you. You must not doubt my devotion. If I had not loved you I would never have sought the Emperor's permission for you to come with us to Galilee. But now you must do something for me. Are you willing?"

"Dear one, you have but to speak the word."

"When next you go down into the dungeon where the prisoners are, Varus, thrust your dagger to the hilt into the breast of that vile wretch they call John the Baptizer. He insulted me, Varus; he insulted me! Humiliated me in the face of hundreds of leering peasants. Nothing but his blood will atone for it. Nothing but his blood! And my chicken-hearted lord is afraid to give the word. O Varus, prove to me that there is manhood left in the world."

The legionnaire stood transfixed while these hot words came hissing from the desperate woman's lips. He had seen human nature in many moods and guises and he knew how to harden his heart when occasion demanded. But never had he heard anything as horrible as this.

Varus loved this woman who had lured him across sea and land with veiled promises of love some day in return. He would do anything to win her gratitude.

But—murder, treacherous, cold-blooded murder! Plunge his dagger into the heart of a defenseless prisoner? He was not squeamish, but he was a Roman. And treachery, even when a wanton beauty demanded it, was a revolting thing.

"But, Herodias," he stammered, "how can I do such a thing? It would be cowardly. And what would Herod say?"

"Oh, tell him the crazy fanatic sprang at you and tried to kill you. Tell him you did it in self-defense. I will see that you do not suffer."

Varus moistened his dry lips, but no word came. His right hand fell to his side, while his left hand holding the spear shook with emotion.

"Herodias," he breathed at length, "Herodias, this is an awful thing you are asking me to do. Give me time, I beg of you, to think it over."

Herodias sprang like a cat from in front of the door, jerked it open, and pointed outward with a shaking finger.

"Go!" she panted. "You are as cowardly as all the rest. Even the Roman soldier has the heart of a chicken!"

Varus stumbled out before her blazing wrath and the door slammed behind him. Bewilderedly he looked up and down the vacant corridor. At the far end a servant was beginning to light the lamps. Subdued noises of a busy household came echoing in from the distance. But Varus was unaware of it all. He passed his right hand across his burning eyes and groaned aloud.

"She is false—false to the very core! But, O Jupiter, how I adore her!"

Meanwhile Herod Antipas had walked unsteadily away from his violent scene with Herodias. Aimlessly he went until he found himself upon a parapet facing toward the west. The sky was ablaze with the setting sun. Down in the valley dusk had already fallen. As he gazed absent-mindedly down along the massive castle walls he saw the lights beginning to flicker here and there. He heard the voices of his servants echoing up from the walled enclosure below, and there was much passing to and fro between the castle and the ponderous gates. Chariots were drawing up and people were alighting.

Suddenly, as if coming out of a daze, the tetrarch awoke to what was going on. The events of the last half-hour had quite driven it from his mind. This was his birthday, and the people alighting from yonder chariots were nobles from near and far whom he had invited to the castle to help him celebrate the occasion. He knew that at this very moment the feast was being prepared. In another hour it would be ready to serve. With an effort he pulled himself together and turned aside to make ready for his duties as host to a brilliant and expectant company.

*

The castle of Machærus was never more brilliant than tonight. For weeks preparations for this birthday feast had been under way. In choosing to hold it at the castle, Herod Antipas had been prompted by both vanity and shrewdness. He was not averse to having his ambitious acquaintances see this invincible stronghold where he could feast or fight in safety and in a manner befitting a king. Then, even more than now, princely friends of today might prove the foes of tomorrow. So it was well enough for them to be given a chance to inspect Machærus, and ponder well before defying its owner.

For it was well-nigh impregnable. Situated upon a lofty eminence, nine miles east of the northern end of the Dead Sea, it commanded a broad sweep of country on every side. One hundred feet below its foundation stones, at the foot of a sheer precipice, rippled a mountain stream. Natural and artificial walls afforded protection against military assault. And here the tetrarch had provided both luxury and protection for himself and his household. It was residence and fortification all in one. It was eminently fitting, therefore, that he should celebrate his birthday here with a banquet that would impress his guests with the wealth and security of their regal host.

Now the hour for the feast had come. In the high and spacious banquet-hall was set the conventional hollow square with couches for the guests. No stiff, formal chairs at those old-time banquets. Musicians were tuning their instruments. Gay talk and laughter filled the room and the corridors as the company assembled in their assigned places. All the high and mighty were there from Judea and the provinces round about. The food was ready and the servants were nervously waiting for the signal to bring it on.

But there is a delay, and it grows more embarrassing as the minutes drag along. The host and his consort have not appeared. Curious, indeed, that he should so far forget the courtesies of the occasion. Has he been taken suddenly ill? Or, perchance, a messenger has come on some pressing errand of state.

But that is not the reason, as Herodias knows very well as she paces like a tigress up and down her room waiting for Herod to come. She has donned her brilliant attire and has sent her maids away. She will not have them witness her anger and humiliation. Varus stands guard at the door, his impassive face betraying no sign of the awful turmoil in his mind and heart. He too knows why Herod delays, and he knows what blind rage is seething in the soul of the woman within.

It is full fifteen minutes after the appointed time when Varus hears some one enter the room where Herodias waits. It is Herod Antipas, and he has come in by the secret passage which leads from this level to the dungeon far below. And again the Roman guard overhears the dialogue between these two, both tortured souls, but for such different reasons.

Herodias is beside herself with fury.

"So! You have come at last! You must also humiliate me before your own guests. I have been waiting —hours it seems. And you need not deny it. I know where you have been."

"I am sorry, Herodias, but I ——"

"Oh, stifle your apologies!" She laughed sardonically. "You have been down in the dungeon again, talking with that devil from the desert. And at such a time!"

"Listen, Herodias. I thought perhaps you were right, that I did not understand the man. I thought seeing him again would convince me that he ought to be put to death."

"And how well you have been convinced! I can see it in your face. And when will you give orders that he shall be executed?"

His reply was scarcely audible, even to the raging woman before him. He spoke out of a soul stirred to its very depths.

"I cannot do it. I tell you, I cannot do it. He stirs something within me—something I do not know what ——"

Herodias shut her lips like a vise. Seizing Herod's arm she whirled him toward the door. Thirty seconds later they were entering the banquet-hall amid the acclaim of the waiting guests.

Herod pulls himself together and acknowledges their reception. A glow of pride slowly lights up his pallid features. His thick, sensual lips part in a gratified smile. And no one would have suspected that the beauty beside him had been a seething volcano only a minute before. She carries herself like a queen, with oriental voluptuousness and grace. Her hair is thick and dark as midnight, her olive cheeks glowing with the warmth of much passionate blood. And the candles and torches are kindly; their softened light does not reveal the lines of care upon her face, nor does it betray the gleam of something like fear in her eyes. Herodias is still a beautiful woman, in a wild, wanton sort of way, and she knows full well how to make the most of it.

Then the feast begins, and for two hours there is eating, drinking and laughter. Among the names tossed about in the conversation, two are frequently heard—John and Jesus. And always they are a signal for more laughter. The markets of the East have been ransacked for food and wine. Too much wine—the flushed faces and glowing eyes of Herod and his courtiers give warning that it is time for the women to withdraw. Herodias gives the signal and they leave the banquet-hall one by one. As she leaves her place she casts a baleful glance at Herod, who by this time is just befuddled enough to be silly and pliable. She perceives that her hour has come. With wine as an ally she will surely conquer.

At the door of her chamber she pauses. There stands the faithful Varus. In a passionate whisper she speaks to him.

"Varus, you may hold my hand for just one little instant. And, Varus, it need not be murder. It will be in line of duty. Within an hour you will have orders from the governor himself."

Quickly she withdrew her hand from his passionate clasp, touched her finger-tips to her own full lips, then to his, darted through the door and was gone before the amazed Roman realized what had taken place.

It was customary at such oriental feasts to have professional dancing girls come in to entertain the men guests after the women had retired. Herod Antipas had provided that this feature of his birthday party should be on a scale commensurate with everything else. The dancers were many and graceful. The maudlin feasters accompanied their flying feet with snatches of unclean songs, while here and there one slipped to the floor in a drunken stupor. Herod himself was in high spirit as a result of much wine and the reaction of his violent scenes with Herodias. He watched the dancers and complimented them, bestowing upon each some little token of his approval.

But one especially had taken his eye. She danced with a grace and voluptuousness far exceeding that of any of the others. Herod was vaguely aware that he had seen her before, that he had had some intimate contact with her; but his befuddled brain and the girl's dancing costume served to prevent identification. When she had finished her dance—it was obvious that her whole aim was to win his approval—he commanded that she be brought before him. There was a thickness in his voice when he spoke to her.

"Listen, girl. I like your performance. I want to give you something for it. What shall it be?"

The girl kept her head bowed and her eyes cast down with assumed humility. She did not answer. Herod was urgent.

"Speak, girl. Do not be afraid. Anything you want, even to the half of my provinces."

Crazy, foolish Herod! He had not the power to give away the smallest village without permission from his master, the Roman Emperor, fifteen hundred miles away. But he was drunk—and worse.

"Please, sire," said the girl, demurely, "may I take a moment to think? I know not just what to ask for."

With a lordly gesture he motions her away. He is swelling with a sense of generosity and self-importance. In two minutes she is back again, dropping to her knees at his feet.

"Anything, girl," Herod repeated, expansively, "anything, even to the half of all my provinces."

"I would not exact so great a favor from you sire," she said. "I have but one small request. I want you to give me at this very moment, on a dish, the head of John the Baptizer."

Herod started, and put up his hand as if to ward off a blow.

"And I wish, moreover, sire," went on the purring voice, "I wish, moreover, that the Roman soldier Varus shall be the executioner."

Herod is shocked almost sober by this ghastly request. His brain is in a whirl with a multitude of clamoring memories. Herodias—her request—his refusal—John in the dungeon—the probing words he had spoken in their many singular talks together—how they jumble in his tortured mind! No, he cannot do it!

But he has promised. He has pledged his word in the hearing of all his guests, and they are watching expectantly, half-mockingly, to see whether he has the courage to carry through. Of course he cannot disappoint his guests and so make himself a laughing-stock.

He claps his hands, and a servant bows before him.

"It is my command that Varus, the Roman guard, shall go straightway down to the dungeon, and cut off the head of the prisoner known as John the Baptizer. Then let the head be brought on a dish and given to this girl, according to her desire. It is my command."

Salome—of course it was she—sprang noiselessly to her feet and ran to where Herodias, her mother, was awaiting her. The plot had worked. Salome, the daughter of Herodias by her lawful husband, Philip, had come with her mother from Rome to Galilee when the latter had eloped with Herod Antipas, Philip's brother. A long-standing tradition has it that she was scarcely more than a child. But this is not so. At this time she must have been seventeen or eighteen years old, which meant maturity in that age and clime. Hers was a wanton, undisciplined nature. She became a dancer, an occupation outside the pale of social respectability. More than this we do not know, except that her mother did not scruple to make use of her daughter's shame to further her own vengeful purpose. When Herodias resolved to appeal from Herod sober to Herod drunk, she thought at once of Salome, of her grace in the dance, and of Herod's susceptibility, when warmed with wine, to a performance like that.

How she did it we shall never know; but, after withdrawing from the banquet-hall that night, she sought out her daughter, and between them they concocted this fiendish plot. And Herodias capped it by having Varus, her lover, named as John's executioner. Could mad hatred, or madder love, go further than that?

A Woman's Terrible Revenge

It was midnight and the dungeon was very still. The prisoners were asleep, stretched out upon the clammy stone floor. Most of them had made pathetic attempts to relieve their discomfort by scraping together handfuls of half-rotten straw or old rags to serve as pallets to lie upon. But some did not have even this much between their emaciated bodies and the cold stone floor. Yet they slept, most of them, breathing heavily, muttering and turning over in their slumber. The air was fetid and heavy, for the ventilation from the two or three small barred windows, to which no sunlight ever came, was not enough to carry off the odor of unwashed bodies and years of accumulated filth.

But one of the prisoners was not asleep. John the Baptizer was sitting near a corner, with his back to the wall, elbows on his knees, his bearded chin resting upon his hands. His matted hair fell down over his forehead, and his face showed the marks of his long weeks of incarceration. Imprisonment was hard upon this man of the deserts and the open air.

Now he is thinking, thinking hard, his eyes glowing like coals in the shadow. After many days in prison he had begun to waver. Was Jesus the expected Messiah, after all? Out in the open, preaching and beholding the works of this man, he had never doubted it. But here his mind had been sicklied over with much brooding. And when one of his old companions had been permitted to see him for an hour, John had asked him to go directly to Jesus and put the question to him: "Are you the Coming One? Or are we to look out for some one else?" This very afternoon the answer had come back. A messenger had told him what Jesus had replied. "Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good tidings preached to them. Let these things bear witness. And happy is he who is not repelled by any of them." A curious answer, and a puzzling one. Yet, was it so puzzling, after all? Can one judge of a man's mission in any other way than by the fruits of that mission?

John's reverie was interrupted by a sound seldom heard in the dungeon at midnight. A key grated in the lock. The heavy door was in the wall where four stone steps led up to it from the floor. Slowly it creaked open, and three men appeared. One was Varus, the other two were private soldiers from the garrison. One of these was carrying a large platter, apparently picked up hastily in the kitchen. Varus had put aside his spear and was carrying a short, heavy, keen-edged broadsword. It was evident that he had no heart for the task upon which he was sent. His handsome features were contorted with pity and dread as the flickering light of a torch carried by the third man played upon them.

The three paused for a moment on the steps and peered about, blinking in an effort to accustom their eyes to the darkness. Some intuition told Varus that John would not be asleep, and he presently caught sight of him where he sat against the wall staring at the unexpected visitors. And some intuition told John the meaning of this midnight intrusion. He knew the time of his departure was at hand.

The men stepped down upon the stone floor and made their way to where John was. Several of the other prisoners, roused and startled by the unwonted noise, sat up and looked around, rubbing their eyes sleepily.

Varus turned his head aside and tried to speak. But at the first word his voice broke and he could not go on.

"John—I ——"

"I know, Varus," said John, quietly. "You have come to behead me. I have been expecting it, and am ready. I do not blame you. You must obey the governor's orders."

Without another word he rose to his feet, stepped forward two paces to where Varus stood, dropped upon both knees and bowed his head upon his breast. Varus raised his heavy weapon—and in another heartbeat it was all over. Quite nonchalantly the soldier with the platter picked up the gory head from where it had fallen, placed it upon the dish, and the three walked out together, with a trail of blood-drops dripping from the broadsword in the Roman's shaking hand.

Five minutes later the platter was delivered to Salome, and she carried it quickly to her mother. Herodias gloats—but at the sight of those staring eyes she hides her face in her trembling hands.

The next morning some of the castle servants came upon the broken, shattered body of Varus, the Roman soldier, lying among the rocks away down by the mountain brook, far below the foundations of the fortress. They said he must have stumbled and fallen from one of the high parapets during the night. His spear was found leaning against the door of Herodias' chamber where he was wont to stand at his vigils.

And when John's disciples heard of what had happened at midnight in the castle at Machærus, they went and fetched his body and laid it in a tomb.

*

Some months later members of Herod's household brought him strange news. A wonder-worker is causing great commotion among the people in Galilee. They say that he heals the sick, gives sight to the blind and drives out unclean spirits. Some believe that he is the reincarnation of one of the ancient prophets, and wild reports of various kinds fly about. Herod listens, blanched with terror. None of these guesses is right, and he knows it. They need not tell *him* anything more. He knows who this man is! "It is John, whom I beheaded! He is risen from the dead!"

From that black hour at Machærus tragedy dogs the footsteps of Herod Antipas. Herodias, his evil genius, gains increasing power over his weakening will. In the gray of an early morning, a year later, he sat as judge of the Man of Galilee. Pilate had deferred to his jurisdiction. But Jesus would not deign to speak to him. Soon thereafter he was forced into war with Aretas, the Arab king of Moab, whose daughter Herod had married but tossed aside for the sake of Herodias. He suffered a stinging defeat. Two years later the vaulting ambition of Herodias persuaded him to go to Rome and ask of the Emperor the title of king. But reports of his cruelties to the long-suffering Galileans had gone before; and, instead of greater honors, he was stripped of what he had, his tetrarchy was taken from him and he was sent into exile, first to Lyons, in France, and later to Spain, where he soon died—"of no use in the universe except as a warning."

But to the eternal credit of Herodias, it must be recorded that she went with him into exile. Not irretrievably bad, even the vengeful Herodias. Down under the dross of a wasted life there must have glowed a spark of that Divine Fire which—who knows?—may in God's good time burn out the dross and purify the soul.

And in unknown graves in far-off Spain the dust of these tragic two has centuries since mingled with the earth from whence it came.

* * *

The apostles rejoined Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to some quiet place, and rest a little while." For people were coming and going in large numbers, and they had no time even for meals. So they set off by themselves in their boat for a secluded place. And many people saw them start and knew of it, and hurried around by land from all the neighbouring towns, and got ahead of them. So when he got out of the boat, he found a great crowd gathered, and his heart was touched at the sight of them, because they were like sheep that have no shepherd; and he proceeded to teach them a great deal. When it grew late his disciples came up to him and said, "This is a lonely place and it is getting late. Send the people off to the farms and villages around to buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "Give them food yourselves." They said to him, "Can we go and buy forty dollars' worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" But he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." They looked, and told him, "Five, and two fish." And he directed them all to sit down in parties on the fresh grass. And they threw themselves down in groups, in hundreds and in fifties. Then he took the five loaves and two fish and looked up to heaven and blessed the loaves and broke them in pieces and gave them to the disciples to pass to the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and had enough. And the pieces they gathered up filled twelve baskets, besides the pieces of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves. He immediately had his disciples get into the boat and cross before him to the other side toward Bethsaida, while he was dismissing the crowd. When he had taken leave of the people he went up the hill to pray.

—Mark 6:30-46 (Goodspeed)

VII

AN IMPROMPTU PICNIC

Excitement in Mahlon's house—They join the crowd—Sermon on the hillside—Sundown and time for supper—Jesus' challenge to the crowd's unselfishness—The miracle of the loaves and fishes.

"Why, Dinah, what are you so excited about? You must not run like that in this heat. You will get a sunstroke."

The little girl—she was about eleven—had come rushing into the house, where her mother was busy with her mid-forenoon duties. She was breathing fast with exertion and excitement. She paused an instant to catch breath before she could answer.

"Mother, you know that strange rabbi who was in the village two weeks ago? The one who had such kind eyes and such a crowd of people following him? You remember him, don't you, mother?"

"Yes, yes, child; but what of it?"

"And you remember the two men who were staying last week at Zadok's house, the men who said this rabbi had sent them here to tell us some good news?"

"Yes, I remember them, too. But why are you so excited about that now, Dinah?"

"Well, mother, the rabbi and several men with him have just gone by. And hundreds of people are following them. Nearly everybody in our village is going, too. Can't we go, mother—can't we?"

"But, child, we don't know where they are going. Besides, there is no reason for being in such a flutter. They will travel slowly. We can easily catch up with them."

"But they are in a boat, mother. The folks who are following are on the shore. They say the boat is going to land in the cove about three miles east of here; and all these people are hurrying to get there ahead of it. They want to see the rabbi again and hear him talk. Mother, we can go, can't we?"

By this time Joanna had caught some of her daughter's eagerness. See and hear the Nazarene again? What a privilege it would be. The spell of his strange power was still upon her, though it was fifteen days since he had sojourned for a few hours in their village.

"Oh, I hope we can, Dinah. Run out into the garden and tell your father and Jacob to come in. I think they are out among the grapevines."

A moment later the three came hurrying in.

"What's all this Dinah is trying to tell us, Joanna? A boat, a crowd of people going somewhere—I can't make head or tail of it."

There was a note of impatience in Mahlon's voice, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"It's the rabbi from Nazareth, Mahlon. You remember he passed through here two weeks ago. Dinah says he is going in a boat with his disciples to the cove, and the whole countryside are hurrying around the lake to get there ahead of him. Dinah wants to go, too, and so do I. But we'll have to hurry.

Mahlon was not averse to taking the day off from his sweltering work in the garden. If everybody else was going, he would go, too. He did not see the famous rabbi the day he was in the village, but he had heard enough about him to whet his curiosity. For one thing, Joanna's tongue had not been so sharp since. He would certainly like to meet the man who could work a miracle like that. He turned to the boy beside him, a dark, dreamy looking lad of about fourteen.

"Run out and gather up the tools, Jacob, and we'll be on our way. Are there a good many going, Dinah?"

Jacob was off like a shot. Already Dinah was searching for her holiday dress, feeling sure that the occasion warranted something more than everyday attire.

"Hundreds of 'em, father," she said. "And everybody in the houses I passed running up here from the lake was getting ready to go. Oh, what a lark it's going to be!"

Not more than five minutes were consumed in making their hasty preparations. All had donned their best holiday garments, their vivid colors glowing brightly in the sultry sunlight. As they hurried out the door they could see a stream of people moving along the shore of the lake about a quarter-mile from their cottage. The sound of many happy, excited voices came clearly to their ears.

Apparently they all knew of the place whither they were bound, a broad, green hillside, rising from a deep cove that cut in from the lake. There were no human habitations near at hand, and, for this reason, it was a favorite resort with those who wished to find quiet when alone or a pleasant loitering spot when in company.

When the four of them were a hundred feet or so from the door, Jacob and Dinah running ahead hand in hand, Mahlon stopped suddenly.

"Wait a minute, children. Wait a minute, Joanna. We have forgotten something very important. What are we going to eat? It lacks only about an hour of noon now, and we certainly cannot get home until after dark if we spend any time at all there on the hillside."

"What a dunce I am not to think of that," exclaimed Joanna. "The children will be hungry to faintness before the sun goes down, and so shall we. What can we take for lunch?"

"Oh, just a snack of anything to stay our stomachs," said Mahlon. "We've not a moment to lose if we are to keep up with the crowd. There's something in the house, surely."

Joanna made a quick mental inventory of the larder.

"There's part of a loaf of barley bread. We can take along some of those nice pickled olives to eat with it. There's a good-sized fig-cake, I'm sure, and quite a bit of the cheese I made from the goats' milk the other day. Oh, yes, there is a small bag of parched corn, too."

"Well, get it together quickly, Joanna. You children wait for us down by the road. And say, Dinah, were most of the people carrying lunches with them?"

"I didn't think anything about it, father. But now that you speak of it, I remember seeing only two or three who had any food with them."

"Just as I thought," said Mahlon, rather significantly. "Two-thirds of 'em started off just as we did, in such a hurry that they never thought of food. Joanna"—this to his wife, who had just emerged from the house with the things thrust hastily into a bag—"Joanna, I'll bet a denarius that most of that crowd haven't got a bite of food with them. It's going to be embarrassing when it comes time to eat."

"That's so," replied Joanna. "I never thought of that. We can go off by ourselves somewhere when it gets near sundown and eat our lunch. We certainly have no more than we need for the four of us."

"A good idea, Joanna. And I think it will be a good idea, too, if I carry that bag under my simlah. No use of letting it be known that we have a lot of food with us."

A few minutes later they had mingled with the company on the highway leading around the lake. A mile or so in front of them they could see people moving along in groups; and behind them for another mile belated pilgrims came hurrying along.

*

What a merry little journey it was. A festive spirit was in the air. Quite naturally those from the several villages grouped themselves together, greeting their friends and neighbors with jest and laughter. The waters of blue Galilee sparkled and shimmered in the sunlight. The road followed the shore-line, roughly paralleling it at a little distance. Now and then some of the children, bubbling over with gaiety, would scamper down to the edge of the water and lave their bare feet in the limpid waves that rippled over the glistening pebbles.

The people talked of many things; but the chief topic was the wonderful prophet whom they were soon to see and hear again. He had visited many of their villages in person, and perhaps half of the present company had caught at least a glimpse of his face and an echo of his voice. Those who had not seen Jesus himself had seen some of his disciples who had lately been going around among the villages two by two doing the same sort of work their Master was doing. This ministry, whatever it was, had a certain infectious joy in it. Without knowing why, the people who had heard it were suffused with an undefinable, half-mystical spirit of light-heartedness. They felt Something brooding over them, a kind of glad premonition which they could not have defined even if they had wished to do so. Hence their eagerness to hear the Teacher again.

And this was the mood in which those hundreds of people were making their way toward the place where they knew the boat would land. Now and then some of the older men would speak gravely of an event which had just come to their ears. It was rumored that John, the eccentric prophet, who had created such a stir in the lower Jordan valley, had been put to death. Herod Antipas had had him beheaded at his birthday feast in the fortress at Machærus. As they spoke of it the men's faces were troubled. A sinister portent seemed to hover for a moment like a summer cloud over the happy throng.

In the meantime the boat was steadily making its way toward its objective on the northeast shore, behind which reared a not-too-precipitous hillside covered with a carpet of green verdure. It was there that Jesus had hoped to find quiet for a few hours where he might rest and talk intimately with his disciples. But the plan was utterly frustrated. He could not escape the eager curiosity of the hundreds who pressed upon him. Even if some of the incautious disciples had not dropped a hint of their intentions, their destination could not have been kept a secret.

Quite a crowd was at the wharf when the boat cast off; and within twenty minutes the oarsmen perceived that people were beginning to move along the shore in the same general direction. It was quite apparent that they intended to head them off and arrive at the rendezvous first. By the time the something like five miles had been covered all doubt was dispelled. The shore at the intended landing place was thronged with people. Their number ran into the thousands, with hundreds more still approaching from the north and west. Little hope of rest in a crowd like that!

As usual, Peter was vexed. Not only vexed but disposed to grumble about it.

"A fine vacation we're going to have, I'll say. And how good we are at keeping secrets! Somebody has been doing too much talking. I propose that we turn and go back. If we can once get into the house, we may at least snatch a few hours' sleep, and perhaps eat a meal in peace."

For a moment no one spoke. All looked inquiringly toward Jesus where he sat silent in the stern of the boat. That peculiar expression, now almost habitual with him, had come into his face again. It was evident that the sight of yon eager crowd had moved him deeply. How aimless, rudderless, leaderless they were. So like children, in a way. And how hungry they were for something, they knew not what; something that would give meaning to life, something that would lighten the crushing burden of the day and revive hope of the future. All sense of weariness fell away from him. He must do something for these hungry, needy souls.

The disciples had been long enough with him to recognize that look and understand its enraptured meaning. At this very moment, they knew, the Master was thinking of what he should say to those high-beating hearts waiting there upon the shore. John looked at Peter, at the same time nodding his head significantly toward Jesus. Peter followed the gesture with his eyes, sensed the situation instantly, and not another word was spoken. Three minutes later the bow of the boat scraped the sands of the shore, with a dozen pairs of sun-browned, sinewy hands laying hold upon it.

One by one the disciples stepped out upon the bank, Jesus disembarking last of all. The crowd made way almost reverently for him to pass. The boat was drawn up onto the beach, the few small articles they had brought with them, including a basket of food, were taken out, and immediately there was a rush for the higher ground. Some of the younger people and most of the children were inclined to make it a real holiday. So they kept to the outer fringe of the crowd, talking and playing in little groups or tumbling on the fragrant grass. But the majority were thrilling in expectation of what the Teacher would say to them. There was much good-natured jostling and crowding as the throng made its noisy way up the hillside.

Halfway up the slope a narrow ledge of rock jutted out forming a natural seat or bench. When Jesus reached this spot he stopped and motioned the people to seat themselves upon the grass. Below him and to the right and left they sat down quickly, the nearest ones pressing up close to the ledge. Until now he had not spoken a word. He stood still and gazed at the people with a look of infinite compassion upon his face. They were sheep without a shepherd indeed. He must lead them. He must teach them.

A mother seated near him put her little child down upon the grass almost within reach of his robe. The little one gurgled, thrust out both tiny hands and clutched the tender grass. Crowing happily she pulled off a few blades and tossed them at his feet, meanwhile gazing up into his face with a look of perfect trust. Jesus looked at the babe for a moment, then seated himself upon the ledge and began to speak. His voice was not loud, but his vibrant tones were heard in the outskirts of the crowd.

"Blessed are those who feel their spiritual need, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them."

There was a stir among the people, a yearning, their spirits reaching out for—what? The Kingdom of Heaven! What misty visions it invoked; yet the mist was shot through with a kind of radiance.

"Blessed are the mourners, for they will be consoled."

There was a stifled sob from a woman, the while she crossed her empty arms over her breast.

"Blessed are the humble-minded, for they will possess the land."

A hoary-haired man shook his head doubtfully. His lips moved, half-audibly. Those sitting near him caught the grim words, "I'm not sure but it's more pride we must have if the land is ever to be ours again."

"Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for uprightness, for they will be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Again the hoary-haired man shook his head. "It does not seem to have been true," he muttered.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Involuntarily a thousand pairs of eyes were raised to the azure sky. So deep-rooted is the human impulse to look upward to find God!

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called God's children."

Another doubtful shake of the head from the hoary-haired man.

"Blessed are those who have endured persecution for their uprightness, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them.

"Blessed are you when people abuse you, and persecute you, and falsely say everything bad of you, on my account. Be glad and exult over it, for you will be richly rewarded in heaven, for that is the way they persecuted the prophets who went before you."

A kind of ecstasy was beginning to grip the crowd. A vibrant note of joy had come into the Teacher's voice; and, with these words as a beginning, he told them heavenly things. An hour passed, two hours, three hours. Still he talked on to that sea of uplifted faces. When he made as if he would stop they implored him to speak more. And for another hour after he had ceased his teaching the people thronged about him, asking questions, imploring the touch of his hand, and holding up their little ones for his blessing.

With an almost startling suddenness the sun drew near the western horizon. A shadowy premonition of the night fell over the hillside. The crowd stirred uneasily, while the children, wearied with their play or from sitting so long in silence, began to whimper and ask for food.

Mahlon and Joanna, with their children, had been sitting about twenty feet to the right of the Teacher, and almost on a level with the ledge upon which he sat. When the crowd began to stir and mill around, Mahlon put his lips close to his wife's ear.

"It is just as I expected," he said. "Nearly all of these people brought nothing to eat. Now is our chance to slip away. We'll go up the hill a little further and find a quiet spot to eat our lunch. I'm about famished."

Joanna was reluctant to go. She did not know just why, for she herself had made the original suggestion. But she felt vaguely that there was some inconsistency between their proposed action and the sublime truths to which they had been listening. Very slowly she followed her husband and children up the hill. Many glanced curiously, some understandingly, in their direction. But she would not go far away, insisting finally upon sitting down in a spot where she could watch what was going on among the people below. Jacob, too, was strangely uneasy, and he sat down beside his mother, facing the crowd rather than the other members of his family. So they took out their food and began to eat, furtively and with averted glances.

Meanwhile a peculiar mood had fallen upon the people. Some wanted to withdraw from the crowd as Mahlon and his family had done. Indeed a few of them did so, and obviously for the same reason. But the majority hesitated. And this air of semi-embarrassment had communicated itself to the disciples themselves. During the long discourse and the more intimate conversations that followed they had been stationed near their leader, serving as a sort of breakwater to keep the waves of humanity from overwhelming him completely. Immediately upon reaching the spot chosen for the impromptu pulpit they had stowed their lunch-basket behind a convenient rock, throwing their few extra outer garments over it. And now they were as anxious as the people to know what the next move might be.

Long before this day Peter had been tacitly acknowledged as the spokesman of the group. He was the oldest of the disciples, and his nervous, motive temperament naturally put him forward. He stepped up close to Jesus and spoke to him in a voice so low that none of the crowd could overhear it.

"Master, see how late it is getting. It will be dark in another hour, and we are a long distance from any of the villages. Send these people away so they can get food. They are hungry, and not many have brought food with them."

Jesus roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen after the people had ceased to press upon him. He stared for an instant at Peter as if not quite comprehending what he had said.

"Send them away? In their half-famished condition? All these women and little ones? Give them food yourselves."

Peter was astounded. The others pressed in closer to hear the conversation.

"Why, Master, what do you mean? Forty dollars' worth of bread would be none too much for all this crowd. We haven't the money. And, if we did have it, where could we go and buy that much bread?"

"Did you not say that some of them have brought food? Why do they not eat it?"

A knowing look came into Peter's face.

"Surely, Master, you are not serious in asking such a question. Those who have food could hardly be expected to eat it surrounded by other hungry people. A few families have sneaked away by themselves to eat their lunch, and it has not made them any too popular. Suppose we should get out our basket and begin eating. I'd like to, all right, for I'm nearly starved. Can't you guess what would happen?"

There was reproach in his voice as Jesus made reply.

"How long will it be, Peter, before you understand that the first principle of our common life is unselfishness? And how little you understand men's hearts. Can we expect these people to do the generous thing unless we challenge them to do it by a noble example? Go and see how much food we have in our basket. And you, John, and James, and Andrew, and all the rest of you, go among the people and ask them to sit down in groups together."

The mystified disciples started rather reluctantly to do his bidding. Peter brought out their basket and glanced at the contents.

"Five loaves and two fishes, sir. That is all we have."

"It is enough. Bring them to me."

It took but a few minutes for the people to be seated. Everybody was somewhat bewildered by the sudden turn of affairs, but no one demurred seriously when asked to sit down again. Jacob, curious to know what was going on, sprang up and ran down to the ledge. He had a piece of barley bread in one hand and a bit of cheese in the other, but he was so interested in watching this unusual drama that he had quite forgotten to eat. Dinah followed him, equally curious to know what it all meant.

All those hundreds of eyes were turned toward Jesus as he stood above them, with the open basket on the ledge beside him. When the disciples had returned from instructing the people, he motioned them to sit down at his feet. He took out the meager supply of food and laid it on the ledge, the five loaves of bread on one side of the basket, the two dried fishes on the other. Then, picking up one of the loaves, he broke it in two and lifted his eyes to heaven. The people scarcely breathed, so intent were they upon watching him.

"Father, thou hast given us this food from thy bountiful store. We acknowledge our gratitude by sharing it with those who have none."

He broke the other loaves in pieces and handed a portion to each of the disciples. In like manner he divided the two fishes and placed a portion in each disciple's hand.

"Distribute these to the people," he said. "Give each person as much as he needs."

To describe what happened is an impossible task. For a moment the crowd neither moved nor spoke. They were overwhelmed with what this man was doing. Forgetting his own weariness and hunger, this man who had been teaching them and laying his healing hands upon their children was now giving away all of his food, and that of his company, to the people who had none. Fascinated they watched the disciples as they approached the persons nearest them and proffered the food. The first two or three timidly and uncertainly accepted a bit of bread and a morsel of dried fish.

Then the miracle!

As if by magic hundreds of parcels of food flashed in sight. Most of them came from under loose, flowing outer garments where they had been secretly hidden all the afternoon. Others had wrapped them in extra garments which they had brought along against the cool of evening. Still others opened baskets which they had kept jealously closed until now, although unconcealed, selfishly unwilling to have it be known that they were carrying food in the midst of a crowd of hungry people. Nearly half of those present, groups or individuals, seemed to have brought something along. It was the plainest kind of fare, caught up hastily in the excitement of setting out—barley bread, cheese, figs and dried fish. But there was plenty of it.

And with one accord those who were supplied began pressing food upon those nearest them who had none. Hungry as everybody was, the givers were far more eager to share what they had than the recipients were to accept what was offered. But in a minute or two the whole assemblage had caught the spirit. Everyone had food and was eating eagerly. The disciples could make no more headway with their task. No one was without something to eat, and they were left with enough in their hands to satisfy their own hunger.

Dinah ran to her mystified parents, Jacob close at her heels.

"Quick, mother," she cried, "the rabbi has given away all his food to those who have none. Let us take him some of ours, for I know he is hungry."

Mahlon and Joanna leaped to their feet. Something heavy, like a stone, seemed to roll off their hearts. Snatching up the food, which they had not been able to enjoy while denying the most sacred obligation of human fellowship, they hurried down the stretch of slope that lay between them and the place where Jesus stood. But, with all their alacrity, their children were there first. Into one of his hands Jacob was pressing a piece of fig-cake; into the other Dinah dropped an olive and a morsel of bread, meanwhile looking up shyly into his glowing face.

"Please, sir," she said, "won't you take some of our food? We have plenty, and you gave all of yours away."

"Thank you, my dears, I will eat it with joy," he replied. Then, looking deeply into the eyes of the bashful, eager children, he added, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Perhaps in all the history of the world there has been no more amazing half-hour; so breathless, so meaningful, so revealing to the heart of man. When all had eaten Jesus turned to his disciples, who even yet could hardly comprehend what had come to pass.

"Go out again among the people, and bid them gather the fragments into their baskets, lest they meet other hungry folk on their way home. Then tell them to depart in peace, for the night is falling fast. And you may enter into the boat and cross over to Bethsaida. I will remain here for a while."

*

Presently the homeward journey was begun, the people returning along the highway by which they had come. They had been happy when they came, they were happy when they departed. But it was a different sort of happiness now. There was less talk and laughter. But the groups walked a little closer together; and in their hearts was a glow of brotherhood which they had never felt before.

Jesus stood in silence on the hillside watching the people depart. After awhile he heard the dip of the oars as his disciples pulled their boat away from the shore. When they had glided a hundred yards or so out upon the water they lifted their eyes for a last look at the Master. They were becoming used to his ways. He wanted to be alone as the night came down. They knew he would rejoin them in the morning.

He still stood motionless, looking down upon the hillside where the multitude had communed together in the breaking and sharing of bread. Faint rays of the fading sunset yet lingered on the hilltops. The disciples gazed, while their oars dipped noiselessly in the shadowy water.

Was that a halo shining round his head? Or was it a sunbeam kissing its kindred spirit good night?

Then Jesus and his disciples set off for the villages of Cæsarea Philippi; and on the road he inquired of his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" "John the Baptist," they told him, "though some say Elijah and others say you are one of the prophets." So he inquired of them, "And who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ." Then he forbade them to tell anyone about him. And he proceeded to teach them that the Son of man had to endure great suffering, to be rejected by the elders and the high priests and the scribes, to be killed and after three days to rise again; he spoke of this quite freely.

—Mark 8:27-32 (Moffatt)

It was about eight days after he said this, when he took Peter, John, and James, and went up the hillside to pray. While he was praying the appearance of his face altered and his dress turned dazzling white. There were two men conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in a vision of glory and said he must go through with his death and departure at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overpowered with sleep, but on waking up they saw his glory and the two men who were standing beside him. When they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is a good thing we are here; let us put up three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (not knowing what he was saying). As he spoke, a cloud came and overshadowed them.

They were awestruck as they passed into the cloud, but a voice came from the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen one; listen to him." When the voice ceased, they found themselves alone with Jesus. And in those days they kept silence and told nobody anything of what they had seen.

—Luke 9:28-36 (Moffatt)

⁂

VIII

A STRANGE LIGHT ON A HILLTOP

"The beauty of the Lord our God"—The end of a day's journey—Four men seek the mountain-side —Was He the fulfillment of hope and prophecy? —Was it a dream?—Peter's baffling question.

It was a funeral service, and the usual half-mystical hush hung over the room. The people had come in quietly, some on tiptoe, lest they break that brooding silence. Odd, isn't it, how we always feel? Even if we have spent years annoying the one who has passed on, now, if we have anything at all to say, it must be in low whispers. Everywhere was the heavy scent of flowers. That is another curious thing, and it is not without its rueful aspect. We have so long associated flowers with funerals that their very odor at any time or place is apt to remind us of those mournful occasions. Perhaps a little change in our habit would be a good thing. Suppose we try sending flowers to our cherished ones while they are still alive and with us. It does seem a pity that one must die to win a floral tribute. Then, maybe, after awhile the fragrance of roses and carnations and lilies-of-the-valley, wherever encountered, will bring memories of cheerful voices and eyes alight with happiness.

The casket was banked with blossoms. A softened light fell upon the peaceful face where it lay against a background of white velvet. A woman had passed on in the fullness of the years, a woman who had been a wife and mother. The minister had thought out the brief address he intended to make, and perhaps it was a bit perfunctory. It cannot help being like that sometimes. But that brief address was never spoken. Something he saw in that lovely countenance thrust the formal words back into his throat.

An unearthly beauty was there. It defied all analysis. No one could have explained it. Just the usual features of an elderly woman, pretty in her girlhood no doubt, now immobile and serene. Lines of care and anxiety were there, deeply engraven upon the forehead and the slightly sunken cheeks. It was the face of one who had lived, suffered, sorrowed and rejoiced, and had now fallen asleep, a face framed in its halo of snow-white hair.

But a flood of emotional memory swept the mind of the minister as he stood and gazed. He knew that hers had been no easy life. Her forty years as wife and mother of a family had been a constant struggle. Never quite in want but always close to the margin of frugal comfort. There was never any money for luxuries, never quite enough for what we call the common comforts and conveniences of life. But she had been happy in making the most of these slender resources. She had one daughter, now a good woman in her own right, and two manly sons. So deeply had she impressed her gentle character upon one of these boys that when he was drafted into the service during the World War he became a conscientious objector. He would perform any service, he said, however menial, but he could not lift his hand with murderous intent against any brother man. The peace of that decision still rests upon that young man's spirit. And through all that stress and turmoil this mother had gone on her way, faithful, patient, serene until she came to the gates of the sunset.

In a single brief moment these recollections came trooping into the minister's mind. They drove out the memory of the words he had meant to speak. Then, turning to the waiting circle of family and friends, he spoke for five minutes, maybe a little incoherently, taking as his inspiration that high invocation from the Ninetieth Psalm which he had just been reading: "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." It was there, he said, written in every line, curve and wrinkle of that lovely face, the beauty of the Lord our God.

But it was not there by accident.

*

It was the end of another day and the little company of tired wayfarers had entered the village to seek shelter and rest for the night. For more than a week they had been going northward by easy stages. Apparently there was no definite objective in view, their course from day to day, and the distance covered, being determined by the reception the people gave them and the effect of the Master's teachings. Each day they made several stops, at hamlets or along the roadside, wherever a group of listeners could be assembled. Each night they halted at the first hospitable home that offered them entertainment.

But on this particular day the journey had been broken only by a brief stop of an hour during the noontide heat. Then they had rested in the shade of a clump of trees, eating a bit of the bread and cheese they carried in the company basket. Jesus had seemed driven by an inner urge, and he would not pause for more than a word of greeting with the many who sought to restrain him. It was evident that he was brooding deeply upon something. For the last three days a mountain-peak, several miles to the northward, had been visible, and as they drew hourly nearer to it he was wont to gaze upon it with a look almost of impatient longing. What a retreat its cool shadows seemed to offer. It was Mount Hermon, they all knew; and by this time the disciples knew also that Jesus would probably seek a retreat somewhere upon its wooded slopes. They talked about it in subdued tones as they journeyed. John and his brother James were walking side by side, Peter and

Nathanael a few paces behind them. Jesus was leading the company and setting quite a pace, his eyes fixed dreamily upon the rapidly nearing peaks of Mount Hermon.

"Why does he seem in such a hurry, I wonder," said James, impatiently, as he swerved to avoid a large boulder at the side of the path. "All day he has been walking as if possessed."

"We shall know within a few hours," replied John. "I am growing to understand his moods pretty well. Ever since that conversation the day we left Caesarea Philippi something unusual has been on his mind."

"I have noticed that, too," said James; "and I have observed that at such times he is never quite himself again until he can spend several hours alone in some quiet spot. I imagine yonder mountain is where he is heading for. You know we didn't get any rest the last time we tried on account of all that crowd closing in on us. But I wonder what it was in that conversation that stirred him up so."

John turned and beckoned the two men behind them to close in a little.

"Let's ask Peter," he said. "Peter, just what was it in that talk the other day that affected the Master so? You did most of the talking—as usual. What do you think about it?"

"Well," replied Peter, "it seems to have been what I said about his being the One who should come. I know he half expected it, though he seemed surprised when I said it. Not surprised exactly, but almost afraid. You know how it is. You have a thing in your mind in a foggy sort of way; then somebody puts it in words and it affects you almost as if you had never thought of it before."

"But, Peter, do you really think ——"

"Think that he is the promised Deliverer?" interrupted Peter. "Yes, I am just about convinced of it, though it seems absurd and impossible when I think of it sensibly. And he is about convinced of it, too, in spite of its impossibility. You know hundreds of people are saying the same thing, but they are careful not to talk it out loud."

"And you think that is what is preying on his mind the last few days?" asked James.

"I am sure of it. And he will not feel easy about it until he has had a chance to get off by himself and think it over quietly. My guess is that he will do that this very night, and his retreat will be somewhere on that mountain yonder. He likes those high places for his meditations. Moreover, I believe that this village just ahead will be our stopping place for the night. See, it stands right at the foot of the mountain."

Both of Peter's guesses proved correct. The little company entered the village a few minutes later. Most of the people seemed to know something about them and were glad they had come. A kindly man, evidently something of a patriarch in the little community, welcomed them into his house and set food before them. Then, after they had rested for an hour and daylight had begun to fade, Jesus called the three most understanding of his disciples to him, Peter, James and John, and they set off together in the twilight. The others were told to wait patiently until they returned.

A mountain is always farther away than it looks. They had been told that they would find a footpath leading from the outskirts of the village to one of its peaks, of which there were three. This one was the nearest of the three, and the lowest. Trees and shrubs garnished it to the very top; and in the summer-time it was never crowned with snow, as both of the other summits usually were. They found this path without difficulty, and were able to follow it by the light of the moon which, approaching its full, hung like a great silver lamp halfway between the zenith and the eastern horizon. But they had covered at least five English miles before they reached a spot which seemed to please the Master's fancy.

And the spot was ideal. It was perhaps a little more than halfway from the foot to the summit of the mountain. An open space in the midst of the trees, covered with a mat of green grass, and flooded with moonlight. The path ran directly through it, a diameter of two or three hundred feet. A little to one side, and in the upper half of the sloping circle, was a ledge of rock with a shelf-like projection, just high enough to afford a comfortable seat. Without a word Jesus left the path and walked up to this rock, beckoning the three men to follow him. They could not help remarking how like it was to the impromptu pulpit on the hill—when the multitude learned the lesson of sharing with one another.

Jesus had talked but little on the way. But they understood his mood and respected it. Anyhow, they did not feel in a conversational mood. It was a time to be reverent and still. The unearthly beauty of the landscape, the windless silence, broken only by an occasional whirring insect, the moon in solemn grandeur marching through the illimitable blue: what a night it was! And then the sense of some new revelation soon to break from the heart and mind of this baffling Leader of men. No wonder the three disciples were content to keep the seal of silence upon their lips!

Jesus seated himself upon the ledge, and with a gesture bade his companions to sit down upon the grass at his feet. They obeyed without a word, knowing that a rare experience was impending. But once or twice before since they began to follow him had they known any such time and place as this, and then he had uttered words of ineffable wisdom. He sat for a time without speaking, gazing out over the moon-drenched world. Down at the foot of the mountain lay the sleeping village whence they had come. Away to the southward, ribbon-like in the pale moonlight, wound the road by which they had entered the village that afternoon. The trees decking the valley and the mountainside, motionless in the breathless night, cast their somber shadows everywhere. And overhead the cloudless sky was studded with stars, like tiny diamonds set around the opalescent moon. As he was drinking in all this beauty, the three disciples, Peter, John and James, sat looking up into his face, as it was partly silhouetted against the moonlight. Perhaps it was imagination, but his face seemed to glow with a kind of radiance. No, it was not the moon, for this was not a reflected light. This was an illumination, an incandescence, shining from some hidden source within.

Then he began to talk. It was evident that he did not expect them to reply, so they spoke no word except an occasional eager question. His theme was the ancient, haunting dream of Israel, that some day God would send the people a Deliverer, one who should lift them up out of the ashes of their humiliation and restore the glory of a far-off golden time. What did it mean? Who was this anointed One to be? Whence would he come? And how would he effect the deliverance of his people?

Wistfully the Carpenter recalled the lessons of the synagogue-school and the long intimate talks he had had with his father Joseph in the little shop in Nazareth. How long ago that all seemed! There they had talked about the heroes of Israel who had foretold or foreshadowed the Messiah. How they had fought, wrought and suffered! Two of these he had loved best of all—Moses and Elijah. What colossal figures they were! Much as the records told of their deeds, they yet gave one the impression of being demigods who moved giant-like amid the shadows of an ancient and legendary time. And both had departed from the earth in a unique way, a way unlike that of any other. They did not die as other men died. They were caught up, as it were, while still in the flesh and were seen no more. Who could take up their unfinished work? Who could spiritualize the mission they had fairly begun and carry it to completion? Who could usher in the true Realm of Heaven? Was it for him to do? Was he, indeed, of the anointed God?

These torturing questions were not addressed to the enraptured disciples, though he seemed to be groping in their hearts for a kind of human sympathy and comprehension. Rather, he lifted his face, suffused with a wordless yearning, to the brooding sky.

Then, rising suddenly, he said: "But leave me alone now. I must wait for the still, small voice. Go yonder into the shadow of that clump of cedars and try to rest. Gather your mantles around you and sleep, for I know that you are weary. I have kept you awake far too long."

Without a word they obeyed him. The clump of cedars the Master had indicated was on the western rim of the open space in which they had been sitting, a hundred feet perhaps from the ledge of rock where Jesus stood. They were tired indeed. But something more than physical weariness had poured over their heavy eyelids. A presence as of something unearthly wrapped them about as in a mist.

John and James lay down well within the shadow, pulled their mantles about them and were soon asleep. But Peter found a spot not far from the glowing patch of moonlight. He lay down with his face turned toward the east, with Jesus directly in front of him. He was about to close his eyes when he gave a sudden gasp and rose to a half-sitting posture. The Master had not moved from the spot where he stood when he bade them leave him alone. The moonlight poured upon him in an amber flood. But what was that around his head? A halo? Peter pinched himself to see if he were really awake. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Then, with a sigh, almost of relief, he saw—or thought he saw—the answer. Jesus was standing so that his head was in a direct line from Peter's eye to the snow-crowned summit of one of the other peaks of Mount Hermon. And the light, falling like burnished silver upon that spotless background, had produced the illusion of a radiance around his head.

Five minutes later all three of the disciples were sleeping soundly.

To the end of his days Peter was never able to explain the events of that night. He knew that he had fallen asleep almost immediately after beholding the illusion of a halo around the Master's head. He was satisfied that it was a perfectly natural phenomenon, caused by the moonlight and the gleam of a distant snow-capped mountain-top. And he was sure that he had dreamed. In his dreams he beheld again many of the figures and scenes which Jesus had reviewed in his impassioned soliloquy. But whether the climax of it was all a dream he never knew.

At any rate, he awoke—or dreamed that he awoke. And there Jesus stood in the moonlight, just as Peter had last beheld him when he closed his eyes to sleep. But a radiance far brighter than the moonlight shone around about him. His face was shining and his garments were dazzling white. But that was not all. Two men stood beside him and were talking with him. It seemed perfectly natural that Peter should identify them—nothing seems unnatural in a dream—as Moses and Elijah. He caught some of the words of their conversation, and they seemed to be talking about portentous things which were soon to happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. But the words were incoherent; and even as they were talking a foglike mist enveloped them all: a cloud, no doubt, gliding across the face of the mountain. The mist hid the three figures from view, and the unearthly light was quenched.

At that instant Peter felt unutterably alone; and with characteristic impulsiveness he cried out: "Master, it is a good thing to be here and look upon this glory. Do not leave us. Abide here, and we will build three booths to shelter you, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." There was no answer—except a sound like a Voice that seemed to come from the clouds. And Peter often wondered whether that was a rumble of thunder from a summer shower a long way up the mountainside.

The next day, about mid-forenoon, as they were coming down from the mountain, Peter ventured to tell them what he had seen and heard. John and James looked at him queerly. They were quite sure that they had slept all night long. Peter must have been dreaming. But Jesus listened gravely, with the shadow of something like a reminiscent smile upon his lips.

Just then they came to a turn in the pathway bringing into view the village about half a mile away. At the outskirts was a company of people, some of whom they presently recognized as the disciples. It was evident that the company had been waiting and watching for their return, for the instant they caught sight of them many shouted, waved their arms and started running in their direction. Jesus pointed toward the eager people and said, laying his hand the while on Peter's shoulder:

"Let us not talk any more about that now, Peter. Such visions are given to us upon the mountain-tops of understanding. Here in the valley are suffering souls who need our ministry. Let us hasten to serve them."

But all that day, and for most of the days thereafter, Peter watched and studied his Master's face. It may have been a dream, but it was a dream inspired by a great reality. The Master's face did shine; and never more than when he healed and blest the yearning souls around him. And that radiance increased in brightness—the beauty of the Lord our God—until his physical presence had departed from them.

*

Years after, Peter told the story to an eager young man who was trying to find the secret of that amazing Life. And John Mark wrote it down, figuratively perhaps; but in his lovely allegory there is a truth as old as the world. It is written upon the faces of all those who have made the great Renunciation.

The passover and the festival of unleavened bread fell two days later; so the high priests and scribes were trying how to get hold of him by craft and have him put to death. "Only," they said, "it must not be during the festival; that would mean a popular riot."

Now when he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, lying at table, a woman came up with an alabaster flask of pure nard perfume, which had cost a great sum; the flask she broke and poured the perfume over his head. This angered some of those present. "What was the use of wasting perfume like this? This perfume might have been sold for over three hundred shillings, and the poor might have got that." So they upbraided her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why are you annoying her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you always have beside you, and you can be kind to them whenever you want; but you will not always have me. She has done all she could —she has anticipated the perfuming of my body for burial. I tell you truly, wherever the gospel is preached all over the world, men will speak of what she has done in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the high priests to betray him to them. They were delighted to hear it, and promised to pay him for it. Meantime he sought a good opportunity for betraying him. . . .

At that very moment, while he was still speaking, Judas [Iscariot] one of the twelve came up accompanied by a mob with swords and clubs who had come from the high priests and scribes and elders. Now his betrayer had given them a signal; he said, "Whoever I kiss, that is the man. Seize him and get him safely away."

So when he arrived he at once went up to him and said, "Rabbi [rábbi]," and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and seized him.

—Mark 14:1-11; 43-46 (Moffatt)

⁂

IX

THE LEATHER-COVERED BOX

Mary of Bethany and the spikenard—Judas makes protest—The home of Iscariot—His call and the leather-covered box—A misfit in the company—Succumbing to temptation—Judas and the Sanhedrin—The betrayal—Judas' terrible death.

The meal had been in progress more than an hour when the incident occurred. Only those who were close by the couch upon which Jesus reclined had noticed anything unusual when the woman approached him. Probably most of the guests who observed it at all thought for the moment that it was one of the maid-servants going about her duties. But those near by heard the slightly muffled crash when the flask of soft-grained earthenware was broken; and a few seconds later the whole room was filled with the odor of a rare and costly perfume. Immediately there was a lifting of heads and a craning of necks to see what unusual thing was transpiring. The young woman had poured a quantity of spikenard upon the Master's head and was now wiping away the superfluous drops with a clean, white napkin.

It was an odd, an unconventional thing to do, and for quite a while no one ventured a remark. It seemed that all were waiting for some word from the guest who had been singled out for this extraordinary honor. But Jesus did not speak. Apparently he was overcome for the moment by what this impulsive young woman had done.

Thomas, whose place was beside Philip's at the table, leaned over and whispered to the latter.

"Philip, do you know who that woman is?"

"Yes, I think I do," answered Philip. "It is Mary, one of the two sisters at whose home the Master has visited two or three times this week."

"Was she invited to this supper, do you think?"

"Of course she was. I saw her come in with her sister Martha. Their brother was along, too. The Master seems very fond of him. Their house is not far from here; and Simon, our host, knew that they were friends."

Thomas reached over suddenly and clutched Philip's arm.

"Look at Judas, Philip. See that expression on his face. Listen! He is going to say something."

It was true. The couch assigned to Judas at the beginning of the meal was three places from where Jesus reclined, on the opposite side from Thomas and Philip. He was one of the few who had watched the episode from the first. He saw Mary when she drew near, and saw what she was carrying in her hand. He knew from the tense, eager, half-embarrassed look upon her face that she was about to do some unusual and daring thing.

Now, so intent was Judas upon the thought he was about to utter, that he swung his feet to the floor and stood erect. As he spoke he held his hand almost caressingly upon a small, attractive-looking leather-covered box which lay on the couch beside him. This box he was very fond of; and lately it was noticeable that he seldom let it go out of his reach. He kept it with him even while he ate and slept.

"What was the use of wasting costly perfume like that? Why was it not sold at one of the bazaars? It would have brought fifty or sixty dollars. You might have given him the money; then we would have had something for the poor, who are continually begging us for help."

There was a note of indignation, almost righteous, in his voice. It seemed to strike a popular chord, too, for several others added their sentiment to his. Poor Mary was quite crushed at this unexpected reaction to a generous though daring deed. She hung her head, while the color flamed in her cheeks. Her lips trembled a little and a tear glistened upon her eyelashes. She turned and was about to run from the room. But Jesus restrained her with a gesture. Seeing that he was about to speak, the murmuring guests fell silent. He did not raise his voice, but there was an incisiveness in his tone which no one could misunderstand.

"Let her alone. It is a shame to annoy her in this way. Can you not see that this is a beautiful thing she has done? It is a good thing to give to the poor, but you always have opportunity to do that. I shall not be with you much longer. Maybe this lovely friend of mine has had a premonition of that. Maybe, in this symbolical way, she has anointed my body for burial. Your motive is good, Judas, but the occasion is untimely."

A constrained silence followed these words. Judas resumed his place, with something like a scowl upon his dark countenance. The gloom which had become habitual with him during the last few weeks settled down heavier than ever. This rebuke, added to his natural melancholy, angered him deeply. The others tried to go on with their eating as if nothing had happened. Mary stole softly away, and was not seen again during the evening. Her sister Martha found her at home two hours later, and did not fail to express her disapproval of the whole proceeding. She had not been convinced by the Master's gallant championship. And it was not until the party was about to break up that the tension relaxed and the atmosphere became comfortable again.

*

From the very outset Judas had been an enigma. No one really understood him, and he never understood himself. He was a man of moods and sharply conflicting desires. His moods were of the blacker sort and his desires fiercely demanding. It was not a day when men knew how to analyze their moods and intelligently master them; so this tortured soul stumbled on to ultimate destruction. But he was an ill-starred man who did not deserve the abomination in which he has been held for nineteen centuries.

His home was in the town or village of Kerioth, in the Judean hill-country, some ten miles south of Hebron. This accounts for his surname, Iscariot. It is a modification of the name of his birthplace: Judas of Kerioth, smoothed off into Judas Iscariot. His father's name was Simon Iscariot—and the family had been workers in leather for many generations. They were typical hill-country people, primitive, rugged and taciturn. They had little sentiment and no sentimentalism whatever. They were wary to the point of suspicion, and self-repression was almost an instinct. Judas was the natural product of such heredity and environment.

The manner in which he became a disciple was as peculiar as everything else about him. He and his father were at work one day in the shop. Judas was cutting a pair of sandal-thongs and Simon was mending a rip in a leathern girdle for one of the neighbors. They never talked much, so it was an event when either of them spoke.

"Father, I think I am going away."

Simon looked up with a startled expression on his face. But, in keeping with his usual habit, he made no reply. Judas kept on with his cutting until he came to the end of a thong. It was no surprise to him that his father did not answer.

"Yes," he repeated, stretching the slender thong in his hands and testing it for strength. "I am going to join that new prophet who is preaching the coming of the kingdom. I believe he is the man we have been waiting for."

"Do you mean that half-crazy fellow they call John who was out here in the hills for a long time?"

"No, father, not John, but some one John told about. He came down from the North Country to hear John; and now, they say, people are following him by the hundreds. They expect to make him king."

"Don't be foolish, my son. That has been tried before. No one can stand against the Romans. We are safe here among our mountains, even if it is a hard scratch to make a living. Better play the game safe, and stay at home."

There was a flash in his eye when Judas answered, and as much emotion in his voice as he ever permitted himself.

"You have used the right word, father. It is the game that is pulling me. I don't want it to be too safe. I want the thrill of some risk. I want to get away from this deadly village humdrum. And I do think there is more than a chance, this time, for the ancient hope of our people to be realized. So I am going—tomorrow."

The laconic Simon said no more. He shared the fatalism of his kind. He just shook his head a little dubiously and went on with his work.

And the next day Judas went. His leave-taking was as restrained as everything else in their strongly inhibited lives. Just as he turned to go Simon touched his shoulder.

"Just a minute, my son. Take this box with you. It was my father's, and he made it with his own hands. You will search a long time before finding a finer piece of craftsmanship. There is a little money in it which I have been saving. You will need it on your journey."

Judas took the box from his father's hand. It was an exquisite thing, about eight inches in length by four inches in width and depth. It was of aromatic cedar, and completely bound in leather, skillfully hand-wrought and embossed. Hinges and clasp were of copper, also finely wrought. It was a thing to delight the heart of an artisan and every lover of the beautiful. Judas wrung his father's hand in silence, then turned and stalked away.

It was a good many days before he overtook Jesus and his little band of followers. Nobody in the hill-country could tell him of John's whereabouts, though one old wood-chopper told him a fantastic story about an odd character, a fanatic probably, who had lodged in his hut for two or three days. When he reached the Jordan they told him to go north, and he followed the highway which Jesus had traveled not long before. Presently he learned of John's gruesome fate; and for the first time his confidence in his mission was shaken a little. At Scythopolis he began to hear definite rumors about Jesus, and by the time he reached the shores of the Sea of Galilee that name was on every tongue. So Judas quickened his speed, stimulated by these glowing tales. His intuition had not played him false. Surely this was the man who was to deliver Israel!

In Capernaum Judas found him. He was in the synagogue that first Sabbath day; and in the evening he mingled with the throng gathered around the door of Peter's house to hear the new prophet's word and feel the healing touch of his hand. The rough garb, the primitive manners, and above all the glowing eyes of this man from the hills attracted no little attention. He elbowed his way through the crowd, clutching the precious leather-covered box under his arm, up close to where Jesus stood. Not a word, gesture or expression escaped the notice of this man who had journeyed a hundred and fifty miles on foot to find him. Jesus saw him, observed the rapt attention Judas was paying, and after the crowd had begun to scatter, the night being now well advanced, he beckoned him to come forward.

"Friend, I have been watching you," said the Master. "You seem to be seeking something. What is it?"

"Sir, I have come to be your disciple and to help you take the kingdom."

"Are you sure, my friend, that you know what you are doing?"

"Indeed I am, Rabbi. Let me come with you."

There was no denying that eager entreaty. Jesus knew that here was a strange, almost uncanny spirit. He felt a throb of misgiving, but gave his consent. Judas had become a disciple.

But he was never quite at home in the circle. All the other disciples were Galileans. Judas was the only one from Judea. Most of the others were city men, uncultured, it is true, yet accustomed to certain amenities of social life. Judas was like the unweathered granite of the hills. The others were expansive, ready, even impulsive, in speech and manner. Judas was a lonely soul, with a kind of native gloom resting like a dark cloud over his spirit. The others were open-handed, almost improvident, as were so many of their neighbors in that day and place. Judas was thrifty, penurious, stingy. Generations of hardship among the hills had put their taint in his blood.

So it was hard for all of them. Hard for Judas because of his solitary, introverted nature; hard for the others because they always felt ill at ease while with him. He could not be assimilated. All they had in common was their faith in the Master and hope in the kingdom he was soon to obtain.

But they quickly recognized that Judas had a certain business efficiency about him. It began as a kind of joke. They spoke banteringly about his leather-covered box. He told them about it, and showed them that it contained money—quite a little money. They observed also that he knew how to get full value for his money, and that he never spent a penny more than was necessary. Then some one suggested, half in fun, that they make Judas the steward and treasurer of the whole company. Did he not have a stout money-box already? Soon it was not a joke but an accomplished fact. Jesus gave his consent, and Judas was made their treasurer. All the money their friends gave them passed into his hands for safe-keeping. Out of these funds he paid for the things they bought to meet their simple needs, and out of them he took the sums which they distributed every day to the poor.

The job was to his liking, and he continued to serve in this capacity right up to the day when that supper was held in Bethany and Mary poured the costly perfume upon the Master's head. So in making protest against what he thought was waste, Judas was actually speaking in an official capacity.

*

Everyone encounters some subtle temptation right in the line of the work he most loves to do. This is an ironic and baffling fact. It was tragically true in the case of Judas Iscariot. He loved money. He loved to see it, handle it, possess it. He loved money for its own sake, quite apart from its value as a medium of exchange. No doubt that he would have become a miser if he had engaged in any ordinary occupation. It is also beyond reasonable doubt that this was a craving which his heredity and barren early environment had greatly intensified.

And now he had been made treasurer. Now it was his privilege to handle a lot of money. Yes, it seemed like a lot of money to him, these meager sums contributed for the support of Jesus and his disciples. Probably he could not help it; but almost immediately he began dallying with the thought of how easy it would be to take and put aside some of this money for himself. Nobody was keeping a check on him. Nobody knew exactly how much was taken in or how much was paid out—nobody but Judas. They were leaving that all to him. And before long Judas had become a petty thief.

But this did not come to pass without a terrific inner conflict. What a strange complex his mind was! On one side he was an idealist of a really lofty and austere type. He knew the higher values and how to estimate them. This is what drew him out of his mountain home and sent him in quest of discipleship with the Master. He was seeking the kingdom. It was a material thing, to be sure, an earthly dominion, built upon earthly foundations. But in that respect his conception of the kingdom which Jesus was to gain was the same as that of all the others. It may be that Judas had a keener and cooler sense of what all this would be worth to him, as a prince in such a kingdom, in terms of money value. Probably he did, more or less unconsciously.

But there was a wide and deep gulf between that state of mind and actually being a thief, a pilferer of petty sums from the community money-box—the precious leather-covered box which his grandfather had made. The first time he withheld a little sum—maybe five cents it would be today—and he realized what he had done, he nearly died of shame and mortification. He had been taught to be thrifty, indeed, but also to be honest and to take no penny which was not his own. He dared not look his Master in the face. He became even more moody than usual, and avoided conversation with the other men. When they stopped along the roadside while Jesus spoke to the people who gathered round them, Judas would sit down and feign weariness, resting his head in his hands.

This enabled him to press his fingers over his ears so that he could not hear what Jesus was saying. Those stern yet gentle words of truth and brotherhood he could not endure.

But having cut the groove and slipped down it once, it is that much easier the next time. Judas continued his petty peculations, gradually increasing the amounts. He could not withhold his fingers from the shining coins he loved. He might have given up his stewardship—wanted to, in fact—but he was afraid to do that lest it be interpreted as a confession of dishonesty. All this time he was in a spiritual turmoil, though the smarting of his conscience gradually lessened in intensity. The outward and visible sign of all this was a growing surliness, a deeper and moodier withdrawing into himself. Jesus perceived this with increasing grief; but even his great spirit could not heal a heart walled about with a barrier like that. And so it went on until that last awful week in Jerusalem.

But here is a curious thing. While his mind had been torn and distracted by this inner conflict, Judas seemed to develop an uncanny shrewdness in sizing up the situation in which they now found themselves. Little by little his early dream of the kingdom had faded. Little by little he lost his faith in Jesus as the one who should become king. Little by little he saw the toils of his enemies closing in around them. He had come to the desperate conclusion that the cause was lost, utterly, hopelessly lost. Jesus could not escape. Would he involve all of his followers in his own fate, whatever that might be?

These were the considerations that crisscrossed their fiery way through the mind of unhappy Judas, torturing him with the question, *What* is to be done? He was brooding darkly upon that very question while the supper was going on in Bethany. The incident of Mary and the precious spikenard had provoked from him the reaction which one might expect from a man who had delivered himself into such a state of bondage. The speciousness of his argument was glossed over with an orthodox rightness. Was it not a waste, indeed? Ought not the price of that costly perfume be used to mitigate the sufferings of the poor? As it was, it was a total loss, with no good done to anybody. Judas simply could not comprehend the impulse which had led Mary of Bethany to do this thing. He simply could not understand that this was something immeasurably above all material values. And perhaps, in his eagerness to rationalize, he was not quite aware of a slimy, lurking thought that he might have appropriated quite a lot of what would have been to him a huge sum of money. Fifty or sixty dollars!

The Master's rebuke is what turned the scale. Judas chose to regard it as a deliberate misinterpretation of his motive. And this, joined with the other forces now raging in his breast, served to crystallize his resolution. He would bring matters to a crisis at once, and save himself in the process. So, as soon as he could get away without arousing suspicion, he sought out the "Hall of hewn stones," where the Sanhedrin was in session, plotting a way to take Jesus into custody without starting a riot among the people.

It was rather a difficult matter to gain an audience; but when the ecclesiastics understood that he was one of the Galilean's close followers they admitted him eagerly. Very quickly he stated his errand. He knew that they were desirous of taking Jesus. What would they give him to point him out to them?

Caiaphas, the high priest, gave a short laugh.

"What do you think we are, fellow? Fools? We know who he is well enough. Why should we pay you for pointing him out?"

Judas now found his natural shrewdness standing him in good stead. He was not at all overawed by the august assembly.

"And you expect to arrest him yourselves?" he asked, craftily. "And in the daytime? What about all these people who are thronging around him?"

He had touched the very heart of their problem. Caiaphas looked at him with a new glitter in his eye.

"This fellow is no fool, after all," he remarked to his interested colleagues. Then, turning to Judas, he said:

"That is the very thing we are afraid of, an uprising among the people. But how could you help prevent that?"

"Sir, if you should send a company of men, and in the night-time, when the people are asleep—But, of course, they could not tell him from his companions. They are all Galileans—except me."

"Yes, yes; but how would they know where to find him? Not to mention identifying him."

"That, sir, is where I may be of service. I know where he goes at night. And we could agree upon a signal."

They had him put out of the room while they considered his offer. Deciding to accept it, they summoned him in again.

"It is a bargain," said Caiaphas. "Tell us where he can be found late tonight, and we will send men to take him. Also tell us by what sign you will point him out to these men."

"But what am I to get for doing this?"

"What will you get? Why, man, you will get immunity for yourself, for one thing. Besides, we will pay you well for it."

"Pay me well? What do you mean by well?"

"You must trust us in this matter. We will see that you are paid generously when we once have him in our hands."

Judas hesitated, not quite trusting these high-headed conspirators. But he finally consented.

"Very well. Send your men about midnight to the grove called Gethsemane, on the west side of the Mount of Olives. You will find him there with some of his disciples. Whoever I kiss, that is the man. Seize him and get him safely away."

*

It is beyond the power of human tongue or pen to describe the events of the next twenty-four hours. For a time Judas experienced a thrill of savage satisfaction. He was getting revenge for the humiliation he had suffered in being publicly rebuked. But that was not all. This would disillusion the other eleven men who were still expecting the revolution that would put Jesus upon the throne of Israel and themselves into places of power in the restored kingdom. That was worse now than a vain hope. Probably it would not amount to much of anything, this arrest and trial of his erstwhile leader. Jesus might be punished by a term in prison, or maybe sent into banishment. His ignorant followers would no doubt be sent home with a sharp warning to look out for impostors in the future.

As for himself—! Well, the least he could expect was a liberal cash reward; enough to set up a little shop some place where he could carry on his trade. He stroked the leather-covered box as he visioned these things in his mind. It was a precious thing, that box. Besides, it contained quite a little money right now, the residue of the company fund. If the company was broken up and scattered—who was better entitled to keep this money than he?

But the reaction soon set in. Such rationalizing could not long obscure the ugly fact that to his other sins he had now added that of treason. He tried to bluff it through by acting as if nothing had happened. He even tried to be jocular when they came together that night in the place Jesus had appointed to eat the passover supper. And Judas trying to be jocular was almost grotesque. By being so unlike himself he betrayed the fact that he was endeavoring to conceal something. But the unwonted solemnity of the little company soon sobered him. Something was in the air. Jesus seemed aware of impending tragedy; and something he said about one of them being about to betray him frightened Judas terribly. Of course everyone was horrified, and demanded to know who it was. It was only a coincidence, of course: but Judas was in the very act of dipping his bread in the same dish with him when Jesus made reply:

"One of the twelve; one who is dipping into the same dish I am."

Judas dropped his morsel of bread, and jerked his hand away as if it had been scorched by fire. At the same instant their eyes met, his and the Master's. They gazed, perhaps for the first time, into each other's very souls. The eleven sat spellbound watching this silent drama. Then Judas rose and rushed headlong, blindly, out into the night.

Two hours later he was lurking under the trees in Gethsemane. Quite subconsciously he had made his way thither, for his brain was in a whirl. In so far as he was able to think at all his whole being was in revolt against the deed he had promised to do. His better nature was struggling for the mastery. But the pitiless forces he had set in motion weeks before now thrust him onward. He was like a bit of wood on a raging stream. So, when the dread moment came, he acted as in a daze. Jesus stepped forth from the shadows where he had been agonizing in prayer. A motley mob was approaching with torches and cudgels in their hands. One who seemed their leader was gazing anxiously around as if in search of some one. Peter, James and John, aroused from sleep, sprang to their feet and strode to the Master's side. Then Judas, still moving as in a dream, stepped forward out of the shadow and kissed Jesus upon the cheek. At this preconcerted signal the mob seized him and led him away.

Now came the revulsion, sudden, overwhelming and complete. Judas realized the awful thing he had done, and for the first time felt an intimation of what was to happen. He stumbled along after the jeering crowd, sobbing, breathless, incoherent. He followed his hapless Master from Gethsemane to the house of the high priest; from there to Pilate's mansion in the early morning twilight; from there to the place where they stripped him and put on the crown of thorns. In a frenzy of agony he watched the mockery of a trial step by step; heard Jesus condemned to death, saw him scourged and spit upon, then led away toward Golgotha with a stranger carrying his cross. At each of these junctures curious observers saw him, with staring, bloodshot eyes, watching the jaws of death closing down upon an innocent soul. And they invariably drew away as from a madman.

Then his heart broke. He turned and ran. Something caught his foot and he stumbled headlong upon the ground. It was a piece of rope that had tripped him, a rope of twisted flax about ten feet long. Perhaps it had dropped from some passing oxcart. Without knowing what he did, Judas seized the rope and dragged it after him. Some blind instinct seemed to be guiding him, and soon he found himself back again in Gethsemane.

The grove was silent and deserted. Judas stopped and stood still beneath the low-hanging branches of a thorn-tree. He looked at the cord in his hand, realizing for the first time that he had it and what it was. Then he looked at the branches above him. A moment later he climbed up into the tree, made fast one end of the rope to a stout branch and tied the other end around his neck.

If there had been other ears to hear, strange words would have been heard. It was a prayer, a piteous prayer of ghastly heartbreak and despair.

"Master! Dear Master! In the other world I will find thee! There, it may be, thou wilt understand and forgive!"

Two boys came along that way an hour or two afterwards. Near the foot of a thorn-tree they saw a curious leather-covered box. One stooped and picked it up; and at the same instant they became aware of a heavy object swinging from a lower limb of the tree. Frightened they ran away to spread the alarm. But they paused long enough to catch breath and peer into the leather-covered box. It contained a few loose coins, not many or of much value. But they discovered that it had a false bottom, rather crudely put in. They pried it loose; and beneath it was full of money.

It was the money that Judas had pilfered, and for the sake of which he had plunged headlong into the dark.

After the hymn of praise they went out to the Hill of Olives. . . .

Then they came to a place called Gethsemane, and he told his disciples, "Sit here till I pray." But he took Peter and James and John along with him; and as he began to feel appalled and agitated, he said to them, "My heart is sad, sad even to death; stay here and watch." Then he went forward a little and fell to the earth, praying that the hour might pass away from him, if possible.

"Abba, Father," he said, "thou canst do anything. Take this cup away from me. Yet, not what I will but what thou wilt."

Then he came and found them asleep; so he said to Peter, "Are you sleeping, Simon? Could you not watch for a single hour? Watch and pray, all of you, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit is eager but the flesh is weak." Again he went away and prayed in the same words as before; then he returned and found them once more asleep, for their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. Then he came for the third time and said to them, "Still asleep? still resting? No more of that! The hour has come, here is the Son of man betrayed into the hands of sinners. Come, get up, here is my betrayer close at hand."

—Mark 14:26, 32-42 (Moffatt)

X

A HEARTBREAK IN THE SILENCE

Stillness and moonlight—Among the olive-trees—The three fall asleep—The agony of being misunderstood—We meet great crises alone—The peace of the long look.

Stillness and moonlight!

Who does not associate them with unforgettable memories? Memories of great happiness, it may be, when earth seemed literally crammed with heaven and every pulse-beat a throb of joy. Moments when the mysteries of life seemed about to whisper their secrets, yet always eluded your eager ears. Moments when some other heart shyly drew aside the curtain and you caught a startled glimpse into its holy of holies. Or perhaps they were moments of exquisite pain. Tear-stained faces turned to the sky, imploring hands uplifted, groping beyond the mystic blue for that comfort which the world has not been able to give. But, whether joy or pain, stillness and moonlight always pour some mystical quality over it. Earthly ties become unreal and tenuous, but you are not quite able to anchor yourself in some greater reality. So the spirit hovers as it were between two spheres.

Gethsemane and moonlight!

Who can measure the influence of this picture upon sixty generations of men and women who have followed Jesus—though perhaps, like Peter, afar off?

*

The shadows in the garden were heavy and deep, in sharp contrast with the crisp moonlight pouring down between the olive-trees. This was a favorite spot, and almost without intent the quiet company had made their way hither. The spell of that final scene in the upper room was still upon them. A strange portent was in the air. Yet they could not believe that the Master's forebodings were quite justified. Anything of a tragic nature seemed impossible in the peace of a night like this. They knew that the ecclesiastical authorities were deeply concerned at the stir which the coming of Jesus to the Passover had excited among the people. They were jealous of him, of course, and alarmed lest he be the means of embroiling them with the Roman officials. They would gladly adopt almost any means of being rid of him or stopping his mouth. But that the high priests really contemplated violent measures the disciples could not believe. Even if they did!—well, there was still plenty of time and opportunity for the popular uprising which would sweep Jesus into power and themselves into comfortable positions in the restored kingdom. Yes, that incident with Judas at the table was disturbing. He had not rejoined them after his hasty exit from the room. But he always had been a queer chap. If he stayed away all night it would not be strange.

There had been little conversation while on the way, such talk as there was being in subdued tones and brief sentences. Jesus himself said not a word. By common consent he was taking the lead, with Peter and one or two others close beside him. They crossed the dry bed of the Brook Kidron and came presently to the road that wound around the Mount of Olives toward Bethany and Jericho. But instead of taking this road he struck straight across it and started up the slope of the hill. At a point perhaps a hundred yards from the highway they paused. Here was an olive orchard, an acre or so in extent, in which they had spent some hours on two or three occasions since coming to the city. The owner was keenly interested in the young rabbi from Galilee and gladly gave his permission to make this a kind of trysting place. Jesus liked to come here for awhile in the evening to rest and meditate. It was far enough from the road to be quiet. It was secluded enough to assure him the privacy he wanted. And trees and moonlight had always allured him. From early youth they had been able to induce in him a mood of spiritual poise and mastery.

"Sit here while I go yonder to pray."

He had taken a half-dozen steps in the direction of a thick clump of olive-trees when he suddenly stopped. He motioned to the three men who had kept nearest to him on the walk to the garden. Peter, James and John stepped to his side.

"My heart is sad," he said to them in a low voice. "Come with me a little way under the trees. There are many things I would like to say to you. Perchance you can lift this load of sorrow."

He led the way to the foot of a gnarled old tree whose branches embraced them in their friendly shadows and they sat down together.

But he soon perceived that this was a battle which must be fought out alone. These three men, devoted as they were to him and what they understood his mission to be, could not share his present pain. They were sympathetic, puzzled, bewildered—and unutterably weary. They tried to listen to the words he spoke, tried to show their concern for the struggle that he was plainly undergoing, but their eyes just would not stay open.

"Stay here and watch," he said. "I will return presently."

Jesus withdrew a little farther into the shadow of the olive-trees. Already the other eight disciples had thrown themselves upon the ground and were sound asleep. Little protection they would be, even if human protection could avail. And within another minute or two the three who had failed him in this extremity, Peter, James and John, were also sleeping heavily.

In every life of the upward impulse there are moments too sacred for another's intrusion. This was one of them. It is too much to hope that we can ever divine, much less fully share, the emotions that tortured the soul of this flaming young Idealist in that brief hour under the olive-trees. But, unhappily, the sheer impossibility of entering into this holy of holies has too often restrained us in any rational attempt to understand *why* the agony of that hour was so utter and overwhelming. But worse than that! Pious imagination has joined with fantastic theology to produce an explanation wholly without warrant either of fact or logical inference.

The agony of that hour was the agony of being misunderstood: the agony of knowing that his mission to the hearts of men was beyond the apprehension of even those who were his most intimate followers. Physical death? And as a common malefactor? The prospect was appalling, to be sure. But it was not beyond endurance. Other men had died, and in circumstances not unlike those now brooding over yonder in the restless, sullen city. But to die without anyone knowing, understanding or sharing the vision of a Kingdom of Heaven in the hearts of men, the vision which had lured him and would not let him go—that was unendurable. To die would be a joy unutterable if it meant tearing the veil from the eyes that could not see. But to die without their knowing! To die with those who had followed him feeling that he had led them like a deluded fanatic into a trap!

"Father! Father! Take this cup away from me! I cannot drink it!"

He remembered the day they returned to Capernaum after the long sojourn into the regions of Cæsarea Philippi. He had noticed that the disciples were arguing hotly about something on the road. Their eyes flashed with anger and bitter words were spoken. Then a sullen silence had fallen upon the whole company, and the cloud did not lift even after they were back in Peter's house. He asked Thomas what they had been quarreling about, but Thomas would not tell. So he called all the twelve together and put the question to them. They finally admitted, not without shame, that they had been disputing about which of them was the greatest. Which of them would be prime minister when Jesus assumed the throne in his kingdom? He shook his head sadly. Still no apprehension of what he meant by the Kingdom of Heaven. But perhaps he could make them understand that human service is the only real patent of nobility.

"Anyone among you who wants to be first," he said, "can achieve that privilege only by being the servant of all."

But they did not get it. To some it sounded almost like nonsense.

How completely they failed to grasp the idea was indicated in a remark which John made almost immediately. They had seen a man somewhere that day casting out demons, abjuring the evil spirits in the name of Jesus. Since this man was not a member of their party, the disciples had told him to stop it. Theirs was a political movement, and anyone who hoped to have a share in it must belong to the organization.

But the most appalling evidence of this failure to grasp the idea of a spiritual kingdom had come while they were on their way up to Jerusalem to the feast, just a few days ago. He had tried to prepare them for what he felt sure was to happen. He tried to tell them plainly that he expected to be taken and killed by his enemies. But they did not believe him. His solemn warning was quite outweighed by the acclamations of the people along the road. Everywhere the people were hailing him as the coming king. The disciples were sure that he was mistaken. Or, if he was not mistaken, he was just saying these things to keep them from getting too enthusiastic before the time was ripe.

Proof of this belief on their part came very soon. John and James came to him privately to get him to make them a certain promise. They wanted to extort this promise before any of the other ten thought of it for themselves. Would he give them the two seats of honor, one on the right hand and the other on the left, when he came into his kingdom? They were perfectly sincere and naïve about it. They thought it would be only a matter of a few days now. This popular enthusiasm, this hot spirit of revolt could not be held in check much longer. So it stood them in hand to make their own places secure.

Jesus looked at them in amazement.

"Men, you do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I have to drink and undergo the baptism I have to undergo?"

"Yes, Master, indeed we can."

"Then you shall do it, indeed. But I have no power to grant your wild request."

Very soon the others knew what John and James had done, and hot indignation seized upon them all. These two ambitious brothers were trying to supplant them and secure the big honors for themselves.

Jesus recalled these unhappy scenes as he struggled there in the shadow of the olive-trees. His disciples did not understand! Could he, by one more effort in this last free hour of his life, make them understand? He rose from his agony and walked to where the three were lying. Sound asleep, and breathing heavily, all of them. He stooped down and shook Peter by the shoulder. Peter gave a start, sat up and looked around. He rubbed his eyes, saw who it was speaking to him, then lay down again. He was much too drowsy to give attention to anything.

No, it was impossible. If men who were awake could not understand, what could he hope of these same men when they were drugged with sleep? The Master turned and walked slowly back into the shadows. Throwing himself down upon the ground, he cried:

"Father, Father, take this cup away from me! Yet—not what I will but what thou wilt."

How impossible it is to comprehend such agony! Without experience, even the most sensitive spirit must fail to enter into that state of mind. Here were twelve men, men chosen because of their vision and idealism, men who had lived and worked intimately with him for months; yet not one of them had grasped the spiritual significance of his mission. One of them, indeed, had failed so completely as to become his betrayer!

Little wonder, then, that the people in general were so utterly unaware of his real purpose. How they had surged about him during the tumultuous days of his career. How obvious was their desire to make him the rallying point of their hatred for the Roman tyranny. And how impervious were their minds to any appeals to substitute good will for the hatred that was cankering their hearts. He had told them as plainly as words could do it that hatred and vindictiveness were impossible weapons for him to use. Yet a multitude had hailed him as king the day he entered Jerusalem for the feast. And they expected him to seize the throne by means of a bloody revolution, and by force.

Even his own family did not understand. Next to the failure of his chosen disciples, this was the hardest of all to endure. Perhaps it was too much to expect his brothers to understand him. They had always resented his habits of thoughtfulness and meditation. They said he was offish, felt himself superior to the rest of the family. They ridiculed what they called his soft-heartedness, declaring that a man must be aggressive and thick-skinned if he expects to get anywhere in this world.

But his sisters—and his mother! He had worked so hard to care for them after his father died. Hour after hour in the little shop, and going about the village in the evening to see what odd jobs he might find to keep food in their mouths and clothes on their backs. He had talked to some of the neighbors then, rather shyly, about the things that were in his heart. How beautiful life might be, if only men were always kind to one another. They could not dispute it; but nevertheless they thought he was an odd young man to be thinking such things.

And he tried sometimes to talk these things with his mother. She did not discourage him, exactly. Now and then some mystic word of his would pierce her heart like a feathered arrow. And that always made her afraid; afraid of what that gleam in his eye might portend. So she invariably changed the subject. And *she* had come with the boys down to Capernaum that day to take him home, thinking him insane because he did not speak and act like other young men. Even his mother, his gentle, worried, baffled mother, did not understand him.

Once more the realization of all this seeming futility crushed down upon his soul. He could not endure it alone. He must seek his companions. But they were still asleep! They did not know what to say to him when he called.

How true it is that in the crises of life the human spirit walks alone. And how inevitable. Along the middle planes of our journey there is plenty of company. Feasting, pleasure, entertainment, even the daily work: in all these things companionship is not hard to find. These things are all on the surface, superficial or of little depth. They lay no tax upon the mind or soul; hence we encounter crowds as we walk these median ways. But up on the heights of vision and illumination, up where the air is rare and clear, and every window is open for the gleams of mystic truth to come in—there we must walk alone. Even if some pilgrim spirit is encountered upon those lofty footpaths, words are seldom spoken, for the things seen and heard are beyond mortal speech. Likewise down in the valley of the shadow, where dark doubts, suffering, repentance, frustration and thwarted hopes assail—along those clouded, shrouded ways the soul perforce must walk alone. Now and again other shadowy figures appear in the mists, other souls bearing in silence burdens too heavy for words. A touch of the hand, it may be; a glance of the eye to let you know that the sojourner understands; then you go on your solitary way again bearing the burden of your own despair. Alone, alone! On the heights and in the valleys alike—alone!

Again the Galilean withdrew into the shadows. Men and earthly things could afford no comfort. Even the men who had shared some of the wonderful experiences of the last radiant weeks; men who had witnessed the discomfiture of unclean spirits; men who had seen hope exultant where despair had been; men who had beheld selfishness overcome and thousands sharing with delight their food and drink with others: even these men could not accompany him down into this valley of the breaking heart.

But why suppose that they could? They had been equally unable to go with him up into the mountaintops. On the one rare occasion he had taken the same favored three with him, perhaps hoping almost unconsciously that their spirits were ready for a higher revelation; but they had fallen asleep, even as they were sleeping now. And the only word spoken was Peter's stammering, incoherent and utterly impossible suggestion that they make their permanent abode there on the mountainside.

Visions come only to those who are ready to receive them. With all his months of teaching, the disciples were not yet ready.

But something like peace was beginning to descend upon his spirit. He had been faithful to his own vision of the kingdom. He had been true to his mission, that of revealing the heart of a fatherly God. He had proved himself a king in the hearts of all men of good will. And he had followed the path of high duty and privilege; he had not turned aside even when to bear witness to his truth of God was to walk deliberately into the jaws of death. More he could not do: less he could not have done. Other men had not understood. His vision they had not attained. But he had borne his witness to the good tidings, the only power able to break the stubborn hearts of men and usher in the kingdom of love and good will. He had blazed the way, he had opened the door. In due time other illumined souls would walk that selfsame way and enter that selfsame door. It seemed as if the Angel of Comfort stood beside him.

"Father, not what I will but what thou wilt."

There was no more tumult in his heart when he emerged for the third time from the friendly shadows of the olive-trees. The men were still asleep. The moon, in its journey across the heavens, had swept the shadow of the trees aside, and Peter, James and John were lying now in the silver moonlight. He could see their faces plainly as he bent over them. They were troubled faces; and now and then their lips moved as if they were trying to answer to some unseen voice.

"Poor fellows," said the Master, with deep compassion. "Even their sleep is broken, for their spirits know that they should be awake and watching with me. But they were not sufficient unto a single hour. Truly the spirit is eager but the flesh is weak. But some day, I know, they will awake and understand. Then they will be flaming witnesses of me and the Kingdom."

While he was speaking a crowd of noisy men was drawing near, carrying torches and clubs and other rude weapons. They had left the road at the very point where Jesus and the disciples had left it, evidently instructed by some one who knew where he was to be found and how to get there. Jesus reached over and shook the sleeping men.

"Come, get up, here is my betrayer close at hand."

The look on Jesus' face when Judas came forward from where he was lurking under the trees and gave the kiss of betrayal was in nowise the look of agony which had suffused it during the last bitter hour. It was a look of quiet peace. He knew what further witness his mission required, and he was ready to bear it. And in the fullness of the days all great-hearted men would know it also.

They took Jesus away to the high priest, and all the high priests and scribes and elders met there with him. . . .

Now the high priests and the whole of the Sanhedrin tried to secure evidence against Jesus, in order to have him put to death; but they could find none, for while many bore false witness against him their evidence did not agree. . . . They condemned him, all of them, to the doom of death; and some of them started to spit on him and to blindfold him and to buffet him, asking him, "Prophesy." The attendants treated him to cuffs and slaps. . . .

Then, after making fun of him, they stripped off the purple, put on his own clothes, and took him away to crucify him. They forced Simon a Cyrenian who was passing on his way from the country (the father of Alexander and Rufus) to carry his cross, and they led him to the place called Golgotha . . . It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

—Mark 14:53; 55, 56; 64, 65; 15:20-22; 25
(Moffatt)

⁂

XI

THOSE REVERED INSTITUTIONS!

Azariah holds a caucus—The plot agreed upon—The reason for the hostility to Jesus—The Sanhedrin votes to arrest Jesus—Jesus before his accusers—Three crosses on Golgotha.

"One thing is certain; something has got to be done about it. I have tried to be patient, thinking this would prove just another flare-up, forgotten as soon as some new sensation caught the mob's attention. But yesterday's affair has brought matters to a crisis. We simply must act, and at once."

The Pharisee fingered nervously with one of the tassels adorning his elegant robe. He had spoken in even tones and with a self-restraint in proper keeping with his dignity; but it was evident that he was raging inside. The veins on his forehead were swollen, and the throbbing of his temples was plainly visible under the strap which held his phylactery in place. Both the phylactery and the straps were unusually wide, for Azariah was one of the Pharisees who made much of the ceremonials. No man in Jerusalem had larger phylacteries, wider fringes or more tassels than he. These things were always conspicuous as he sat in the front seat of the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and they never failed to inspire the proper sense of awe in the breasts of the common people.

But at this moment it was all that Azariah could do to make his words and gestures comport with his customary poise. What he had just said was the conclusion of quite a little speech.

"But, Azariah, do you mind giving us a detailed account of just what happened yesterday, exactly as you heard it? For I suppose you were not there in person?"

The second speaker was Gamaliel. His mood was in sharp contrast to that of the Pharisee who had just spoken. He was an older man, and there was a look of mature wisdom in his face. In all the externals he looked very much like Azariah, for he was a Pharisee too. But it was noticeable that he wore no tassels upon his robe. His phylacteries were much smaller; and as for fringes, they were scarcely visible. He had maintained silence up to this time, listening carefully to the excited comments of the other four members of the group.

"No, I wasn't there myself," said Azariah, impatiently. "I rather fancy if I had been there things would have turned out a little differently. But my informant was there, and I don't think he exaggerated matters at all, for his account agrees substantially with the story that is now running like wildfire all over Jerusalem. Everything was orderly enough until that frowzy fanatic from Nazareth arrived with his frowzier followers. He was crazy enough before, in all conscience, if we can believe half of what folks have been saying. But the silly demonstration when he arrived day before yesterday must have turned his head completely. A mob of people gathered at the city gate—you know how easy it is to get a crowd together, with thousands arriving for the Passover. Well, this mob began shouting and waving branches which they had stripped from the trees as they came along, for all the world as if it were some king who was entering the city. They even hailed him *as* a king. Nothing more was needed. It convinced him of something which evidently he had been believing himself for a long time. Now he had the proof. He was a real personage! He needed only to assert his authority to have all the people at his beck and call.

"So yesterday morning when he and his rustics came back into the city they went straight to the temple. He had evidently made up his mind to do something spectacular and was just looking for an opportunity. Of course the money-changers were there in the temple court, as they have been for years, also a few stalls where doves were being offered for sale. Those fellows are certainly a great convenience. What would the people do who come from a long distance if it were not for them? They have foreign money, and they must get it exchanged for Phœnician coin before they can pay their temple-tax. And the poor families who can't afford any offering but a pigeon or two need not hunt all over Jerusalem to buy them. But this Jesus, when he saw them there carrying on their trade in a perfectly legitimate manner, rushed at them like a crazy man. And before they realized what it was all about, he had knocked over their tables and dove-stalls, and money was scattered all over the pavement. It must have caused a real panic, for no one had the presence of mind to fight back. Instead, they all ran away as if Appolyon himself was after them. And for two hours or more he had everything his own way. He stopped everybody from carrying a vessel of any kind through the temple area; and he kept saying to the people who gathered around with eyes, ears and mouths wide open, 'It is written in the scriptures that this shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. But these fellows have made it a den of robbers!' "

"Well, Azariah," remarked Gamaliel, quietly, "we shall have to admit that he has correctly quoted the scriptures. And I think we shall have to admit also that the money-changers and the dove-sellers were there illegally. And we must admit still further that the way they have been grafting on those ignorant, helpless people is a disgrace."

"No, I will not admit all that," said Azariah, hotly. "Technically, perhaps, they had no right there; but long usage has established a certain right which no unwashed peasant from Galilee should be suffered to challenge."

"But, Azariah," persisted Gamaliel, "you know they would have been ejected long ago if it had not been that they were sharing their graft with the priests. I'd hate to guess how much Caiaphas and his gang are getting out of it. I am not exactly defending the way this Jesus went about it; but it was high time somebody cleaned the place out."

"Well, there are more decent and orderly ways of going about it. And if we overlook offenses like this we shall soon have a state of anarchy on our hands. Nothing would please the Romans more than to have an excuse to interfere in our internal religious affairs and take away the last vestige of our freedom. That is why I insist that we *must* do something about it."

Perhaps a few words of explanation will serve to introduce this company and explain in more detail what had brought them together.

There were five of them. The three so far unmentioned were Nicodemus, Shimron and Heber. Like Azariah and Gamaliel, Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man of wealth and well advanced in years. There was a mystic quality about him not discernible in any of his companions. He scarcely spoke during the entire conference, and he gave one the curious impression that he was listening for some word or meaning quite beyond anything that was being said. He was like the other two also in being a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish hierarchy.

Shimron and Heber were lawyers, but we must be careful not to use that word in its modern connotation. They were students of the Mosaic code and the Torah, expert authorities not only in the letter of the Law but also in that vast body of rabbinical tradition which had been built up since the days of Ezra. There was a steely hardness about both of them, especially Heber, which boded ill for anyone who lacked reverence for tradition and what they called law and order.

These five men had come together at the earnest insistence of Azariah, who felt that the nation was facing a crisis. They were meeting in his home, and precautions had been taken that no outsider should have knowledge of it. Azariah was aware of the influence of Gamaliel and Nicodemus. The Sanhedrin would listen to them with great respect. It was important therefore that both of them should be in possession of all the facts. Shimron and Heber had been called in because of certain information which they had about Jesus and his attitude toward the sacred institutions of the land. Tomorrow there was to be a meeting of the Sanhedrin. Tonight, if Azariah had his way, the five of them would agree upon the recommendations they would make to that august tribunal concerning the man who had turned Jerusalem topsy-turvy and threatened to make the Passover the occasion for an anti-Roman political uprising.

"What do you propose that we shall do?" asked Nicodemus, picking up the suggestion in Azariah's last remark.

"We must arrest this man and put him on trial," said Azariah. "We have evidence enough to convict him of disturbing the peace. We can clap him in jail and keep him there till after the feast, at any rate. But, unless I am greatly mistaken, we can bring a greater charge than that against him, and make it stick, too. The man is guilty of treason and blasphemy. In that case we shall not need to bother with any jails. There's a quicker way."

And his jaws snapped with bitter hostility.

"This is a serious charge you are making, rabbi," ventured the cautious Gamaliel. "Gossip is not proof, you know. The Sanhedrin will insist upon evidence. Who and where are your witnesses?"

"Two of them are right here. That is why I asked Shimron and Heber to meet with us tonight. I want them to tell you what they have actually seen and heard. Shimron, suppose you speak first."

Shimron was eager to make his contribution. This was better luck than he had dared hope for. He was going to have a real share in bringing this insolent heretic to justice.

"This happened yesterday also," he began. "It must have been three or four hours after the riot which Azariah has just described. Word of the tumult had been brought downtown, and as soon as I could get away from my business I started for the temple to see for myself what it was all about. I met a couple of other lawyers on the way and we went up the hill together. When we reached the court of the Gentiles we saw a big crowd gathered in Solomon's Porch, so we walked over there to investigate. It was made up of the commonest sort of people, most of them from the country. I saw three or four Pharisees standing round and listening, but they did not go too close, for some of the rowdies kept staring in their direction and nudging each other as if it were a huge joke.

"It was just as I thought. That fellow from Nazareth was haranguing the crowd. How they did enjoy it! He was poking fun at us lawyers and Pharisees. Of course he was too shrewd to tell the people not to obey our orders; but who could mistake his irony? 'Be on your guard against the lawyers and Pharisees,' he was saying; 'they sit in the seat of Moses, so do whatever they tell you. Obey them, but do not do as they do. They talk but they do not act. They make up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but they will not stir a finger to remove them. Besides, they do all this just to show off. They make their phylacteries broad, put wide fringes and tassels on their robes, and are always scrambling for the best places at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues. Nothing tickles them so much as to have you salute them in the market place and call them "rabbi." These are the men who appropriate the property of helpless widows, and then, to cover up their hypocrisy, offer up long prayers.' "

Azariah's face flushed red and he looked down, almost with embarrassment, at the ornaments upon his own garments. Unconsciously his right hand sought the big phylactery fastened to his upper left arm. His temples were throbbing more hotly than ever, and it was becoming increasingly hard to maintain his self-control. Heber's lips were set in a tight, bloodless line. Nicodemus and Gamaliel were both somewhat dismayed at Shimron's recital, but there was a glint of a smile in Gamaliel's eyes.

"Let us not get too excited, Shimron," he said; "perhaps the fellow is not so far wrong on that, too. We are too fond of the limelight; we do make too much of our meticulous rules. And I have heard of lawyers who managed to make the business pay pretty well."

"Business?" Shimron almost shouted. "What do you mean? You know perfectly well that all our work is without pay."

"Yes, yes, Shimron, I know that. But do not be so indignant when some one intimates that perhaps you do not work for nothing. Why should we try to keep up such a pretense? But I fear I interrupted you. Pray go on with your story."

"Well, on he went in the same strain, getting more abusive every minute. And the crowd just ate it up. He spoke slurringly of all our sacred customs. He called us impious and irreligious. He accused us of overlooking the important things in the law—as if we didn't know more about the law in a minute than he can ever hope to learn!—and intimated that we were doing wrong in collecting tithes. How does he think the church can be supported? The truth is that he wants to destroy the church. And he wound up by calling us whitewashed tombs, vipers, hypocrites and everything else he could think of. I was never so enraged in my life."

"But why did you suffer him to talk that way? Why did you not rebuke him?" exclaimed Azariah.

"I tried to, but the crowd hooted at me. If I had persisted they would have mobbed me. I tell you he has the people all on his side."

"That is the dangerous thing about the whole situation," said Azariah. "We must act promptly, but in secret. The people must not know what we are doing until we have him safely under arrest. That is why I asked you here tonight. We must stand together in urging the Sanhedrin to deal with him. But I want you to hear Heber's story, too. You will see that this is more serious even than we imagined."

Heber was more than ready.

"I have a number of things I might report," he said, "but there is one in particular which indicates to me the dangerous character of this man. It happened some months ago; but the more I think of it the more danger I can see in it. It strikes at the very root of all our efforts to keep our racial blood pure and without heathen taint. Incidentally, it reveals something else, too—this fellow's idea of preaching. You know he is continually preaching, though they are really harangues, and the people regard him as a genuine prophet. Well, such sermons! Utterly without form and dignity. Whether in a synagogue on the Sabbath or beside the road somewhere, his tricks are the same. Instead of a logical exposition of the law, he tells stories! Ask him a question about something, and it is ten to one that he will answer by telling a story!

"Well, it happened that I had to go up to Capernaum on business; and that was when I first heard about this crazy Nazarene. I ran into one of his gaping crowds one day and stopped for a few minutes to listen. Several were asking him questions as he talked; so when he began speaking about eternal life, I thought I'd touch him up a little and see if he knew anything about his subject. 'Rabbi,' I said—I knew that would flatter him—'rabbi, what am I to do in order to have this eternal life you are talking about?' He came right back at me by asking what is written in the Law. I quoted that passage about loving the Lord thy God and your neighbor as yourself. 'That's right,' he said. 'Do that and you will live.'

"The people began to laugh. He had made it appear that I had asked a foolish question, and I didn't propose to let him get away with it. So I put another question. 'But who is my neighbor whom I am to love as myself?'

"Then he pulled that story trick. But that isn't the half of it. The *kind* of a story it was! I'll not try to repeat it, but it was something about a traveler who was beaten and robbed on the road, and nobody paid any attention to him but a Samaritan. That was bad enough, considering how we feel about those worthless Samaritans. But he wasn't satisfied with that. He made it appear that a priest and a Levite had both gone right by the man lying there by the roadside without doing anything for him. It was after that that the Samaritan came along and picked him up. He insulted me both going and coming. First, by dragging a dirty foreigner into it at all; and then by making it appear that the foreigner was superior to two of our own holy men. And he told it in such a convincing way that he had the whole crowd with him. And then when he wound it up with a question to me, 'Which of these three men, in your opinion, proved a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' what *could* I say except, 'The man who took pity on him.' 'All right,' he said, 'you have the answer to your question. Go yourself and do the same thing.' "

A few minutes later the group dispersed. The understanding was that when the Sanhedrin convened the next day they were to urge that Jesus be arrested immediately. Heber, Shimron and Azariah voted eagerly for it. Gamaliel consented with reluctance. Nicodemus did not say a word, but departed in silence.

The rest of the story is too terrible to dwell upon in detail. It all came about according to the scheme of the plotters. Yet that word seems too harsh when we remember that the men who inspired and wrought this awful deed honestly believed that they were doing God a service.

The Sanhedrin convened the following day. Azariah jammed his proposition through. The protests of the minority were brushed aside. It was now a question of saving the nation; and the life of one peasant, even if he were simply deluded rather than of criminal intent, was a small matter when thrown upon such a scale as that. Nicodemus did not appear. Perhaps he could not endure the thought of being present when the die was cast.

After the vote was taken and the session had adjourned, the leaders agreed upon their method of procedure. The next day or evening the arrest should be made. The Sanhedrin would be called into extraordinary night session, although that was illegal, the hearing would be held immediately, and everything would be settled by dawn and before the populace knew what was going on. Thus they would forestall a riot.

It was while they were puzzling over the safest way to make the arrest, having in mind the danger of a popular uprising, that Judas Iscariot came seeking an audience with the Sanhedrin. In the light of this coincidence, how could they doubt that the God of Israel was with them?

But daybreak was already at hand when the Carpenter was led before the waiting Sanhedrin. His hands were bound behind him, his raiment was torn and disheveled. There was an angry welt across his left cheek where one of his captors had struck him with a rod. An awful weariness was upon him, for it was many hours since he had slept. The agony of spirit through which he had passed and the brutal handling of the mob had brought him to the verge of physical exhaustion. No use any more to look around for a possible friend in the crowd. He had seen them all disappear one by one; Judas, who had pointed him out to his foes; Peter, who had become panic-stricken when charged with being his friend; all the others, singly and in groups, when they realized how helpless and hopeless the tragedy had become. The rest of the way he must travel alone.

"This fellow," said Caiaphas, the high priest, "is guilty of treason, sedition and blasphemy. We are concerned only with the last-named charge. Pilate will take care of the other two. He has violated every tradition of our race, and made mockery of our most sacred institutions. This man will testify concerning his contempt for the Sabbath."

The man indicated stepped forward.

"Tell the council in a few words what you said to me yesterday."

"As you know, sirs, I am from Galilee, having come up for the Passover. I saw this man and his followers plucking heads of wheat on the Sabbath. Then they rubbed them in their hands and ate the kernels. Our learned men said that that was doing work on the holy day. Moreover, he had just come from the synagogue where he had healed a maniac, also on the Sabbath."

"That will do. Now we shall hear from one of our most esteemed legal authorities, who can speak not from hearsay merely but from personal observation. Honored colleagues, this is Heber, one of the best lawyers in Jerusalem."

Heber stood up quickly and spoke with steely incisiveness.

"To my actual knowledge, honored sirs, this fellow has consorted with the common riffraff of the nation, pagans, prostitutes and tax-collectors. He has not only eaten with them, but he has partaken of food which is ceremonially unclean, and that without first washing his hands up to the elbows, as our sacred law requires. He has precipitated disorder in the services of the synagogue; he has declined to observe the rules concerning fasting; and he has challenged the right of the imperial government to impose and collect taxes. He threatens the stability of all our institutions, and we are all under suspicion by the Romans because of him."

Caiaphas turned to the Carpenter.

"You have heard all this testimony. Much more like it is ready to be submitted. What have you to say?"

Jesus looked at the high priest, but his gaze seemed far away.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. All these things are facts, simply as facts. But the charges are not true. I have not violated the heart of any of our laws. Rather, I have been honoring the spirit of them, putting human welfare and mercy above the letter of mere legalism. These things you ought to have practiced—without omitting the other."

"So, you have confessed! Now, one more question. Are you the Messiah? Are you the Son of the Blessed?"

"It is as you say; I am."

Almost with one voice the council cried, "What further need have we of evidence? We have heard it from his own lips."

Why tell the story of the farce before Pilate? The Sanhedrin could not pass sentence of death; the

Roman state reserved that power to itself alone. And to wring such a verdict from Pilate they played upon his ambition and fear. This man claimed to be king of the Jews? Who and what, then, was Pilate? To his protestations that he thought the evidence insufficient, they retorted, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Cæsar's." And when he offered to release Jesus, following a custom of the Passover season, they demanded that he release Barabbas instead, Barabbas, a gangster and seditionist.

And now, the sentence of death having been confirmed, a band of Roman soldiers took the Carpenter in charge, and the march to Golgotha began.

*

Nine o'clock in the morning, and three menacing crosses were silhouetted against the blue Palestinian sky. The thousands thronging the city streets cast a careless glance in that direction. Three more vagabonds had been nailed up to die. It was all in the day's work—and pleasure. The scores passing along the road near by, intent upon reaching the city in time to participate in the closing rites of the feast, looked curiously at the three grim gibbets and the little knots of people hovering in the background. What odd customs they had in these big cities! And how interesting that they should witness a triple execution while on this visit! Something to talk about when they got back home.

The Carpenter did not moan or cry out when they stretched his form upon the ugly cross-bar. His lips were seen to move in a whispered prayer as four soldiers seized his hands and feet and held them where four crude chalk-marks had been made.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

The hammers are driving in the nails. The first two or three strokes were muffled and deadened as the spikes tore their brutal way through nerve, muscle and tendon.

The Roman captain marveled. Crucified criminals did not commonly submit in such amazing silence. And when the upright post dropped with a thud into the three-foot hole, still there was no sound. Only a terrible shudder that ran like molten lightning through the piteous frame.

And how strangely dark it seemed for a bright sunny morning! The captain blinked and brushed his hand across his eyes.

Hark! The Man on the cross is speaking. But his words are not meant for earthly ears.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

The captain was still palpitating with an unearthly awe when, an hour later, with the sun standing at the zenith, he saw the Galilean's head fall forward, and a cry escaped his lips.

Years afterward some who heard it avowed that it was the cry of a broken heart, addressed to a God who had forgotten.

And the captain covered his face with his gauntleted hands, and whispered,

"This man was certainly a son of God."

Whenever there is silence around me
By day or by night—
I am startled by a cry.
It came down from the cross—
The first time I heard it.
I went out and searched—
And found a man in the throes of crucifixion,
And I said, "I will take you down,"
And I tried to take the nails out of his feet.
But he said, "Let them be
For I cannot be taken down
Until every man, every woman, and every child
Come together to take me down."
And I said, "But I cannot hear you cry.
What can I do?"
And he said, "Go about the world—
Tell everyone that you meet—
There is a man on the cross."

⁂

By this time it was evening, and as it was the day of Preparation (that is, the day before the sabbath) Joseph of Arimathaea, a councillor of good position who himself was on the outlook for the Reign of God, ventured to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised that he was dead already; he summoned the captain and asked if he had been dead some time, and on ascertaining this from the captain he bestowed the corpse on Joseph. He, after buying a linen sheet, took him down and swathed him in the linen, laying him in a tomb which had been cut out of the rock and rolling a boulder up against the opening of the tomb. Now Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Jesus noted where he was laid.

And when the sabbath had passed Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought some spices in order to go and anoint him; and very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb, after sunrise. They said to themselves, "Who will roll away the boulder for us at the opening of the tomb?" (for it was a very large boulder). But when they looked they saw the boulder had been rolled to one side, and on entering the tomb they saw a youth sitting on the right dressed in a white robe. They were bewildered, but he said to them, "Do not be bewildered. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified? He has risen, he is not here. That is the place where he was laid. Go you and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He precedes you to Galilee; you shall see him there, as he told you.'" And they fled out of the tomb, for they were seized with terror and beside themselves. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid of ——.

—Mark 15:42-47; 16:1-8 (Moffatt)

⁂

XII

CONQUERING DEATH—AND SOMETHING WORSE

Seven in the Upper Room—A wonderful anniversary—Zacchæus' demon cast out—Confession of Judas, brother of Jesus—His mother speaks—The demoniac of Gadara—The testimony of the Roman soldier—Of Mary of Magdala—The mystic cross.

There was a cautious, timid knock at the door. The six persons who sat around the room in the half-light of a single flickering bronze lamp all gave an involuntary start. The knock had been expected; but when it came their overwrought nerves leaped for an instant beyond control. The woman who sat nearest the door moved quietly toward the entrance. Putting her lips close to the casement, she spoke a single word in a half-whisper. The others could not catch the reply from without, but it was evidently satisfactory, for the woman loosed the fastening on the inside and swung the door cautiously open. A sturdy male figure entered. Instantly the door was shut again and fastened.

The other five persons in the room stepped forward to meet the last comer. He wore the uniform of the Roman legion. Quickly removing his helmet, he spoke in a gracious voice, yet employing the Aramaic dialect with some difficulty.

"Peace be upon you, my friends."

"And upon you, my brother," responded all of them.

With a gesture the woman who had opened the door indicated a vacant place and he seated himself. It was evident that no one else was expected, for no more seats had been provided.

What a singular company this was! They seemed not quite acquainted with one another, yet no one could doubt that some common loyalty had brought them together. There was an understanding among them which did not await the usual social formalities. It underlay and overleaped all such superficial things. But the silence, which had fallen upon them after the exchange of greetings with the Roman legionnaire, had become almost embarrassing before it was broken by a man with snowy hair and beard who sat in the exact center of the little semicircle.

"Surely the ways of the Lord are past finding out."

His voice was low and vibrant with emotion.

"How strange that we should be here tonight, just we seven men and women, and just seven years after that other never-to-be-forgotten night when He was here in this very room eating the Passover supper with the twelve of us. He sat almost where I am sitting now. My heart nearly breaks when I remember the look on His face when He said that one of us was about to betray Him. How we flamed with indignation! Yet, poor Iscariot! His sin was less terrible than mine; for I denied Him three times, almost before my vows of eternal fealty were cold upon my lips."

His voice broke and he fell silent. The woman who sat beside him reached over and touched his trembling hand with the tips of her cool fingers. Her lovely face was untroubled. The lines which time had etched upon her countenance served only to accentuate a look of ineffable peace. And her voice was that of one who had gone down through all the hells of darkness and pain but had emerged into radiant light.

"Do not reproach yourself any longer, Peter. You know how quickly He forgave you. He knew and understood. And all our hearts and minds were so dull and slow to believe. There was no other way. He had to suffer and die and come back again into our hearts before we could understand that He was truly the Anointed of God and that His truth was the truth of the kingdom. And to think that I had the joy of bringing Him to birth and nestling Him as a babe upon my own breast! If mothers could only believe in the potencies of their own flesh and blood!"

"Yes, Mother," interposed a man's voice from the opposite end of the semicircle; "but that is our common human frailty. We seek the divine everywhere except in our very midst. You remember how ashamed I was, and how resentful, when my brother began saying and doing all those wonderful things. Folks laughed at Him and said He was crazy. And I was humiliated that one of our own family should bring ridicule upon us. I could never forgive myself if I did not know that He has forgiven me."

"Yes, Judas, I know," said Mary. "There was a time when I almost believed that awful thing myself. But now! Oh, the joy and the beauty of it all!"

By this time Peter had regained his self-control and reassumed his office as spokesman of the little group.

"It was almost too much to hope that we could keep this appointed tryst. How incredible all the circumstances have been! More than five years ago it was when the fury of our foes broke loose. The blood of loyal Stephen was the signal, and Saul was the firebrand. Strange about him, too. They say he went to Damascus to seek out and torment our brethren there; but he has utterly disappeared. The authorities do not know what has become of him. And that night when we met, seven fugitives, huddled in the deep shadow of a wall, waiting for a chance to slip out of the city before our enemies could lay hands upon us. Seven of us. And all His disciples. There must be some spiritual magic in that number. And which of us was it who made the suggestion that we should endeavor to meet again, just seven years from the night of His passion, and in this very room, to bear witness unto the power of His salvation? Caleb, it was you, was it not?"

"Yes, it was I," replied the man addressed. "I had a wonderful story to tell you then, but there was no opportunity. And it has grown more wonderful still in the years that have passed."

"And here we are, all seven of us," resumed Peter. "All of us have come at great peril, and some of us from afar. Peril is everywhere around us. Just now, at the Passover season, the hatred of our enemies is especially bitter towards all the followers of Jesus. They see now that they slew Him in vain. It was only by great good fortune that I got this room for us tonight. Hilkiah, who owns it, is secretly a disciple. He remembered me as one of the two men who had arranged for our Passover supper seven years ago. He hesitated a long time; but when I gave him our secret word and sign he finally consented. Only we were to take every precaution. He doesn't want his place to fall under the suspicion of the Jews. That is why the door is locked and we have only one small lamp. But we need not fear. The protection of God is around us. And now let us open our hearts to one another. Zacchæus, may we not hear from you first of all?"

A short little man, almost a dwarf, stood up from his seat.

"Oh, you need not stand," said Peter, hastily. "We are all brethren here."

"I know that well," responded Zacchæus; "but all of you have not really seen me before. And it was too dark where we were hiding together that night to see one another clearly. I want you all to look at me. Behold how small and insignificant I am in stature. Yet Jesus found something in my greedy soul worth saving."

Then he sat down, and began immediately with his story.

"I was tax-collector in Jericho for the Roman government. I had paid a big price for the job and had to get my money back, though I am not offering that as an excuse for all my heartless extortions. I had always been greedy. I had always wanted to be rich. And this was my opportunity. I collected every possible penny in addition to what I had to send to the government, grinding the faces of my own people without mercy or scruple. And I was fast growing wealthy.

"Then Jesus came to Jericho. Of course I didn't believe the extravagant things they were saying about him, but I *was* curious. And I envied him his popularity. Do you wonder at it, when I was hated so? Well, you have seen me standing up before you. Could *I* hope to see anything in a crowd? A hundred cubits or so down the street from my office was a sycamore-tree. I knew Jesus would have to pass that way, so I ran down and climbed up into that tree. I confess that I was ashamed of my curiosity, but something within impelled me to do this undignified thing.

"I guess you all know what happened. When the Galilean came that way he looked at nothing but me. And his eyes probed into my very soul. I climbed down at his word; and he told me he was coming to lodge at my house. And I a tax-collector, hated by everybody in Jericho! Of course the guests whom I invited all came; their hatred was no social barrier! Shall I ever forget that dinner? What winged words came from the Galilean's lips! And his words had not wings alone but tips and barbs. They pierced my heart and stuck there. He said nothing to me directly, except such remarks as a courteous guest would address to his host. But all his words went home. And I realized how mean and unworthy I was. With his vision of brotherhood before me, the sight of my ugly, greedy soul filled me with horror. But at the moment of my deepest humiliation a strange light flashed within me. I knew I could be different; and with that revelation came a sudden resolve. And I stood up there in the presence of my astounded guests, confessed my wickedness, and promised restitution. The spirit of Jesus had driven the devil of greed out of my heart.

"And since that day my joy has been to seek out the poor of Jericho and pay back some part of what I had wrung from them. It has become the passion of my life, and the people there love me now. Yet it is not me they love, but the Master of life who overcame in me the demon of selfishness."

Judas was first to break the pause that followed this dramatic recital.

"The more I ponder upon it the more marvelous it seems. But my brother always had that strange power. Those who were close to Him could not harbor evil spirits in their hearts. And after He began proclaiming the Realm of God that power of exorcising these demons became greater than ever. I remember that I could not be vexed or ashamed of Him when He was near. And then, when He walked so bravely into the arms of death rather than prove false to the word He had spoken, a devil was torn out of my heart, too.

"I don't know whether I can make you understand what I mean or not. It was a kind of pride, I guess; false pride to be sure, as I now know very well. I could not endure the thought of being different from other people. I wanted all our family to be like our 'respectable' neighbors. But Jesus always was different. Now we all know why. But even when I was a little boy I used to be red with anger if one of the neighbors made a slighting remark about Him as some one was sure to do when He said unusual things or lost Himself in one of His day-dreams. Then, as I grew older, my resentment turned against Him, for I felt somehow that He was to blame for making us all conspicuous. He was too religious to be respectable! But I understand now, Zacchæus. My demon has been cast out, too. Now I know that my immortal brother was right when He said that paradoxical thing about losing one's life if one would save it. Citizens of the Realm of Heaven must needs be unlike their conventional neighbors."

"You speak justly and wisely, my son."

It was Mary's quiet voice now speaking.

"When you were children together He had that spiritual sway over all your minds. It was not merely that He was the first-born. That does not account for it. From the beginning He had been given a certain mastery over the souls of those who were close to Him. But my evil spirit was doubt. There were times when I, too, thought it was a kind of insanity in Him. I could not believe that *my* son had spoken with God. Yet why not my son? Am I different from all other mothers who have dreamed great dreams for their boys? But since that day on Golgotha, and the shining vision in the garden, that evil spirit of doubt has never again entered my heart. My son is the son of God. And, if He, why not *all* the sons of all the mothers of men? Let the mothers only awake to that truth and it will be so."

A long silence ensued. No one was ready to speak, for each was dwelling fondly upon some cherished memory. But after a few moments Peter spoke again.

"The demons of doubt, pride and greed all cast out! All power is given unto Him. But, Caleb, you have a testimony to offer as great as any of these. Tell us what the Master did for you."

"What shall I say, and how shall I begin? You all know who I *am*, but you may not all know what I *was*. I was the demoniac of the Gerasene country, whom the Master found and healed. When He saw me first I was a raging, raving maniac. But since that day my life has been full of an untroubled peace. I did not try to understand it at first. The thing itself was so wonderful that I was content just to know that it had come to pass. But during these seven years it has all been made clear to me. That is why I said a moment ago that my story now is more marvelous than it would have been had I told it when we were huddling together in the shadow of that wall.

"I was possessed of the demon of fear. From my earliest childhood I was afraid; afraid of almost everything that a normal child accepts as a matter of course. It terrorized me to meet strangers. I thought they meant to do me harm. My sensitiveness made me nervously fearful, and I was constantly making some blunder that called down punishment upon my head. And my body was as sensitive as my spirit. Even the slightest stroke of the rod was exquisite torment, and I would quiver for hours at the memory of it. So punishment, instead of helping me, only increased my fear until it became literally an obsession of terror. Nobody understood me, my parents least of all. Gradually I withdrew from the sight of people. If I came unexpectedly face to face with anyone a kind of panic seized me, and I uttered incoherent words, and ran away. So the report went abroad that I was filled with a legion of demons. But now I know it was nothing but morbid fear. To escape the sight of men I used to hide myself in the rock-caves near the lakeside, sometimes even in empty tombs. I know I must have appeared as terrible as I really was in my tortured mind.

"One morning I was prowling among the rocks at the edge of the sea. Coming suddenly around a jutting ledge, I found myself facing a strange company. A boat had just pulled up to the beach and men were stepping out upon the shore. I wanted to turn and run; but at that instant one of the strangers caught my eye. I felt rooted to the spot, and I know I shouted some incoherent thing. Then the miracle happened. The man said something to me, and the tone of his voice was like the light in his eyes—full of sympathy and a great understanding. One blinding thought flashed over me. 'Here is a man who knows how to be kind.' Then something seemed to snap in my brain. I know I shouted terribly, then fainted dead away. Afterwards I heard a foolish story about a herd of swine who took fright at my shriek and ran into the sea. They said my devils had gone into the swine.

"When I came to myself I knew I was healed. The men had bathed my poor, wounded, dirty body, and had put some of their own garments upon me. And then Jesus—of course you know it was He—sat and talked with me for a long time. He held my hand, and His every word was like healing balm. He told me of the love of God, and that men who have learned of His love have no fear or hatred for one another. And since that day I have lived in the assurance of that healing truth."

The Roman legionnaire had listened with sparkling eyes to everything which had thus far been said. When Caleb's last words were out of his mouth he spoke impulsively.

"I had wondered whether other men had known such an amazing experience as mine. Now I see that they have. My devil was the spirit of racial hatred and political intolerance. I am a soldier of Rome, and have been since my youth, trained to despise all who are not Romans. For ten years I have served with my company in this province. Our headquarters are at Tiberias now, and it was a rare good fortune that sent me here with a few comrades as an extra guard during the Passover season. Otherwise I could not have kept this tryst. But perhaps it was God, rather than good fortune!

"But we used to be stationed here in Jerusalem. And how I hated the Jews! They were so turbulent and hostile to our authority. I never let pass any opportunity to extort money from them. One day, with three of my comrades, I went on leave to Jericho. We found the people all excited about some new prophet who was preaching and baptizing over by the Jordan, so we went over there just for the entertainment of it. That was my first glimmer of heavenly light. This preacher, John they called him, told me something of the meaning of the Realm of God; and it was while we were there that Jesus came to him and was baptized. The glow on His face haunted me for days, but I still harbored my devil of hatred and cruelty.

"But the rest of my story is almost incredible. I was one of the Roman band who led Jesus to Golgotha after Pilate had consented unto His death. I held His right hand stretched taut upon the arm of the cross while the nail was driven in. And I wondered why they were crucifying a man like this. I watched His face, scarred with blows and streaked with dried blood that had flowed from wounds in His forehead made by thorns pressed down upon it. But there was no anger there, no resentment. And I could not help hearing the whispered prayer that came from His lips. 'My Father, these men who are torturing me are thy children, my brothers. Father, forgive their heedless hearts and open their minds that they may understand.'

"*I*, His brother, a child of *His* God? And I had hated all who were not Romans, particularly Jews! I was bewildered. And then, after the cross had been set up and made firm, I heard that other unearthly prayer, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Then my heart broke, and my devil was destroyed. I became His disciple from that hour.

"It has not been easy to follow Him. It is hard to be a soldier and a disciple of our Master. But my sword has not been stained with blood since that day, yet I have not betrayed any trust imposed upon me. On the night when Saul's persecution broke loose in the city I was attending a meeting of the disciples. Unknown to my comrades, of course, though I was not on duty. The house where we were meeting was surrounded by a mob who howled for our lives. I managed to make my escape, and I had just dodged into the shadow of that wall to avoid meeting some ruffians when the rest of you came creeping softly in. It never occurred to me that my uniform would protect me. But ever since that day on Golgotha I had ceased to think of myself as a Roman soldier. I was just a brother, trying to follow our greater Brother who died to give meaning to the truth of Brotherhood. Many of my comrades have remarked this change in me, and some of them I am sure are following Him in their hearts."

Peter turned toward the woman who had opened the door to admit the legionnaire.

"Mary of Magdala," he said, "I wanted your word to be the last in our cycle of testimony, for it is the most amazing of all; even more amazing than what Lucius has just been saying. You all know that the devils that Jesus drove out of my heart were an ugly temper and a cruel tongue. Let that be my testimony in a single sentence. Now, Mary, tell us your beautiful story."

Magdalene's cheek glowed with an incandescent beauty. Her voice was low, and she spoke almost as if communing with her own heart.

"They used to say that seven devils had taken up their abode within me. My tongue was a two-edged sword, and I wounded my friends and ruined reputations without a qualm. The poison of gossip was honey to my lips. I plotted and executed revenge upon all those who I thought had injured me. Though wayward and unstable in my own heart, I was bitterly intolerant of the sins and mistakes of others. I had wealth, but I used it for my comfort and indulgence alone. And when I first heard of Him I was furious, because I thought He was only a vagabond agitator who was seeking to upset everything and destroy the security of those who had property. That is the kind of woman I was when I saw Him first—at war with myself and all the world.

"The first time He looked at me I felt a subtle change taking place within. I had a curious feeling that He was not looking at me as I was but rather at the woman I ought to be and could be. My hostility began to cool and I was eager to learn the secret of Him. I gave money to His followers to provide for their needs. I went with some other women to watch Him and hear his teaching, and my friends began to sneer at me for being His disciple. Then I followed the company up here to Jerusalem. Anyway, it had been a long time since I had come up to the Passover. You all know what happened then. At the foot of the cross I met His mother, and there our two hearts became entwined for all eternity. And in the gathering twilight we watched to see where His broken body was laid.

"I was almost conquered, but not quite. My hostilities were gone, and an indescribable change had come over me. But I could not reconcile myself to His death. He was the only god-like man I had ever seen. And He had been crucified. It was not just. It was not right. These things could not be in a world where a good God reigned. And these doubtful, half-rebellious thoughts were tormenting me as we walked to the tomb with our spices and ointments on that memorable morning.

"But I cannot *tell* you what I saw and heard. Heavenly light and life where we had expected gloom and death. And a voice speaking to our hearts telling us that Jesus lived! And then, when the others had gone, filled with terror and joy, to carry the news to the disciples, a Presence stood beside me there in the garden and His well-known voice uttered my name. He was not dead, but gloriously alive. And He has been living in our hearts since that radiant day. Where He abides there is no room for any tormenting spirit, not even the fear of death. For He has conquered even the grave."

*

The bronze lamp was burning low and the shadows in the room were deepening. Through the two narrow windows came in the subdued noises of the street. A brooding silence had fallen upon the little group, each one cherishing the memory counted most dear.

Then, with a kind of start, Peter awoke from his reverie.

"The hour grows late. Our dream of more than five years ago has come true. Now, before we part, never to meet again in this world, let us observe the ordinance which He established in this room seven years ago tonight."

Mary, the mother of Jesus, brought out a simple loaf of bread; Mary Magdalene opened a wine-skin newly filled with wine. Peter reverently broke the bread. Mary poured out the wine into a silver goblet. There was a moment of silent blessing. Then, taking the broken bread from Peter's hand, Zacchæus and Caleb gave to the others, and they ate together—in remembrance of Him. The goblet passed from hand to hand, from lip to lip, then back again to Peter. He rose to his feet, and the others with him.

"He gave us power over unclean spirits—greed and pride, doubt and fear, hatred and meanness of soul—and He Himself had power over Death."

Perhaps it was because the light was fading, maybe because their eyes were misted over with happy tears; but in the far corner of the room, glowing faintly at first, then brighter and brighter, were the dim outlines of a cross. The silver of the waning paschal moon, the gold of the sunlight and the redness of their hearts' blood seemed mingled in its ineffable radiance. And in all their memories was the echo of the Master's words:

"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his lord. . . . And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me."

THE END

Date Due

NEW BOOK

N 10 37

FACULTY

~~APR [illegible]~~

~~[illegible]~~

7re

"If It's a Religious Book
Try Blessings"
Blessing Book Stores, Inc.
Chicago

PZ3 .A212G
Glimpses of grandeur
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00146 0247